

CHRISTMAS TRUCE AT FRO

STORY TOLD IN
LETTERS FROM
THE TRENCHES
TO DAILY MAIL



AN E-MAIL SITUATION REPORT (SITREP) OF THE PUTNAM COUNTY VETERANS SERVICE AGENCY

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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Each year our Christmas Issue opens the same way. The message is so powerful and universal it should be read each year.

In 1914 there was an unprecedented and unofficial Christmas truce between the British and German Troops. The US had not entered the war; in fact the war was only a few months old. Perhaps the troops knew that it was going to be a long and bloody war, they were the people who were doing the actual fighting after all. There was never another Christmas Truce during the war to End all war. Garth Brooks, in his classic song "Believe in Me", created an American Christmas Truce. The only problem is that the Battle of Belleau Wood took place in June of 1918 not Christmas time. Also as mentioned earlier the US was not in the war at the time of the truce.

Notwithstanding creative history let each of us embrace the spirit of that Christmas Truce and pray for peace and keep close to our hearts those who even now guard the gates of freedom.

From the Veterans Service Agency Staff

Barbara Tanya & Karl





PUTNAM COUNTY EXECUTIVE
KEVIN M. BYRNE

December 2025

Dear Putnam County Veterans and Military Families:

Warm holiday greetings from our family to yours! Putnam County is not only a great place to live, work, and raise a family – it's a model of patriotism and service. Each and every day, as I travel around our community, from Garrison to Brewster, I'm constantly impressed by the support our community has demonstrated for our nation and its military heroes.

From the popular Row of Honor flag display to the Hometown Heroes program to our array of programming, artifacts, and exhibits for America's 250th anniversary, Putnam residents are proud patriots who recognize and appreciate American exceptionalism.

Most importantly, I remain amazed by the incredible support and love Putnam County shows its Veterans. We have amazing community partners and active local organizations who always lend their time and effort to support the men and women who presently serve and have served in our Armed Forces. Organizations like Guardian Revival, United for the Troops, local VFWs and American Legions, and others are always working on behalf of Putnam County Veterans. We're proud to support them all.

I would be remiss if I did not also thank our outstanding team at the Putnam County Veterans Service Agency, led by Director Karl Rohde and Deputy Director Tanya Pennella. Karl and Tanya take great pride in assisting the Veteran community, and I am grateful for their vital work.

Thank you as always to the men and women of Putnam County who have served this nation.

I wish you all a very Merry Christmas, Happy Hanukkah, and a safe, healthy, and happy New Year!

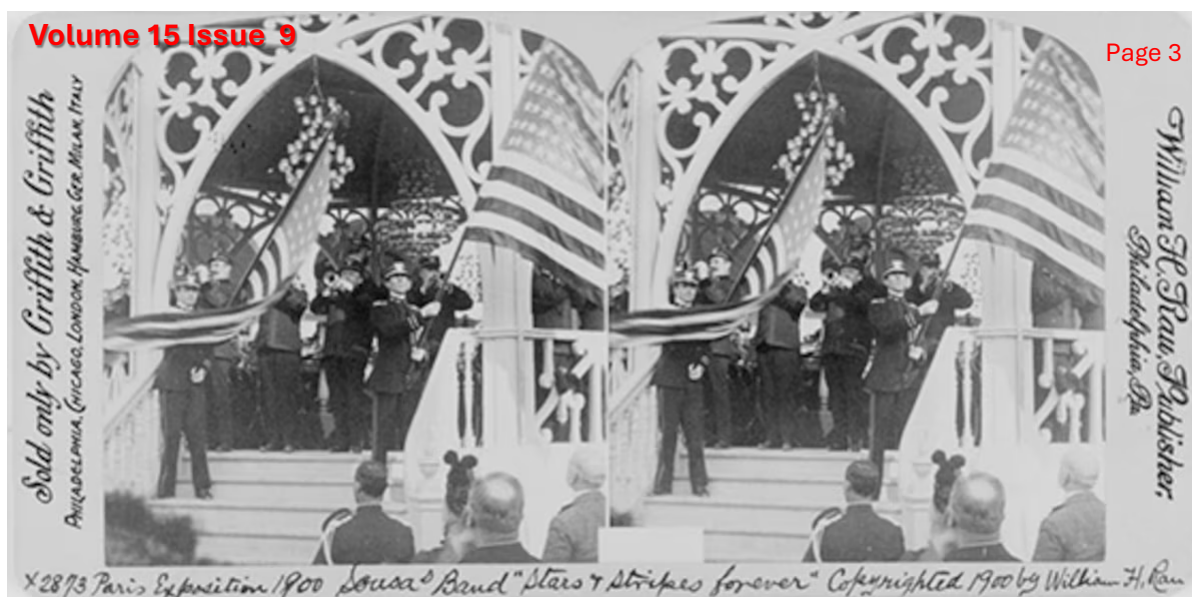
With gratitude,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, which appears to be "Kevin M. Byrne", is written over a circular blue ink stamp. The signature is fluid and extends to the right.

Kevin M. Byrne
County Executive

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On Christmas Day every year, many Americans relax and enjoy time with their families. For many of our troops, though, it can be a day of sacrifice and hardship. Over the history of the U.S., several big military actions have taken place on Dec. 25. Here are four noteworthy ones.

4 Major Military Events That Happened on Christmas

While this wasn't exactly a military action, it's definitely a symbol of America's military might. John Philip Sousa, who grew up during the Civil War, was a talented musician who became a long-time director of the U.S. Marine Band. Known as the "March King," he was a rock star of his time, eventually starting his own band in 1892. On Christmas Day 1896, while crossing the Atlantic on his way home from a European vacation, Sousa's lasting legacy came to him. He said the notes for "Stars and Stripes Forever" were born out of homesickness and fond memories of his time as the Marine Band's leader. The iconic song officially became America's national march in 1987.



The winter of 1776 didn't start as a good one for Gen. George Washington's Continental Army. They suffered many defeats in the first few months of the American Revolution and had been pushed out of New York and New Jersey into Pennsylvania. For the troops, morale was low. Washington needed to renew faith in the battle for independence, so he decided to surprise the Hessians — German troops hired by the British — who were stationed in Trenton, New Jersey. He figured that doing so after the enemy's Christmas celebrations would find them groggy and unprepared for a fight, especially as a terrible winter storm was brewing. So late Christmas night, Washington and his troops hopped in boats and waded across the icy Delaware River to test his theory — and he was right. At dawn on Dec. 26, about 2,400 frozen Continentals pushed into Trenton, and they did indeed surprise the enemy, who surrendered within an hour and a half. The mission, which became known as the Battle of Trenton, was of huge significance to the Continental Army's cause. Not only did it raise the troops' spirits, but it revived the hope of the colonists, who were beginning to think their battle for independence wasn't feasible.

1864: The First Battle of Fort Fisher



For most of the Civil War, North Carolina's Fort Fisher saw very little combat. But that changed on Christmas 1864, when the Union decided it wanted to capture the last port the Confederates held on the Atlantic Ocean. It was a debacle for the Union. First, the Union tried to pack a warship with explosives and blow up the fort's walls — but that didn't work. It just blew up their ship and alerted the Confederates of an imminent attack. So on Christmas Eve, the Union tried again, bombarding the fort with heavy gunfire, most of which fell short or missed its target. On Christmas morning, Union commanders decided to shell an area north of the fort so troops could land and come ashore. But when they did, more disappointment followed — the fort's heavy artillery was completely unscathed, so that was a no-go, too. It was only then that the Union ordered troops to retreat. While the first Battle of Fort Fisher was a massive failure for the Union, the second wasn't. In mid-January 1865, Union troops were finally able to capture the fort, effectively cutting the Confederates off from global trade and supplies. The Civil War ended three months later. (Continued on next page)



1972: Operation Linebacker II in North Vietnam

American troops were in the middle of the biggest bombing mission in military history during the Christmas season of 1972. The air campaign, called Operation Linebacker II, has largely been considered the action that ended U.S. involvement in the Vietnam War.

President Richard Nixon ordered the bombings to begin on Dec. 18 after North Vietnamese delegates walked out on peace talks. Nicknamed the "11 Days of Christmas," the operation consisted of 11 successive days of raids by B-52 Stratofortress bombers flown in from Andersen Air Force Base in Guam.

The only day that both sides got a reprieve was Christmas, when troops were given a 36-hour break to celebrate. During that time, Nixon ordered the North Vietnamese to return to the bargaining table. The North Vietnamese refused, so the bombings continued until Dec. 29, when they agreed to resume peace talks.

In 11 days, Linebacker II dropped 15,000 tons of bombs via 729 U.S. Air Force sorties involving about 12,000 airmen. Defense Department records show the raids destroyed or damaged 1,600 structures, 500 rail targets, 10 airfields and 80 percent of North Vietnam's electric-generating capacity. Fifteen U.S. B-52s were also destroyed in the process, killing 35 men and leading to the capture of nearly 40 American prisoners of war.

The resumed peace talks that came from the campaign led to the Paris Peace Accords in January 1973. The U.S. ended its involvement in the war soon after, but the last American troops wouldn't leave the country for another two years.

Lest we forget



DAVE CRANLUND ©





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KARL IMHOFF, DIRECTOR
TANYA PENNIEJA, DEPUTY DIRECTOR



~~A CHRISTMAS STORY~~ ~~A THANKSGIVING STORY~~ ~~A NEW YEAR'S STORY~~ A STORY

Many of us in Vietnam would have treasured the above Zippo lighter as a Christmas gift. However the most cherished gifts came from home and I thought it would be nice to tell a story about a gift from my Mom. It was actually a Thanksgiving Gift but I did not have it to open until a bit after Christmas.

About a week or two prior to Thanksgiving a package arrived at the 523rd Signal Battalion mail room for me. This was my new unit. The logistical problem was that I was at the 23rd Medical Hospital with malaria. So the clerk in the mailroom checked the roster and saw where I was and sent the package to the 23rd Med. However by the time the package arrived I had been transferred to the 91st Evacuation Hospital. The clerk at 23rd Med mailroom followed the protocol and sent the package back to the 523rd Signal Battalion. When the package arrived back at the 523rd the clerk again checked the roster and sent the package to the 91st Evac. Once it arrived there I had once more been transferred to another facility.

This time I was transferred over 200 miles south to the 6th Convalescent Center in Cam Ranh Bay. So once more the package was returned to the 523rd and then sent to the 6th CC. You get the over all theme. Of course, by the time the package arrived at the 6th CC I was now back at the 523rd battalion area. Finally around New Years Day this package was in my hands. Not counting the days it took to come from the states, NY to be precise, it was in my hands 35 days after Thanksgiving.

I tore the box open. What to my twinkling eyes did appear were 6 pepperoni sticks wrapped in aluminum foil. In keeping with the Christas spirit those sick of succulent meat had turned green with mold. I quickly took them to the latrine and with the help of a brush scrubbed the green off the sticks. Presented them to my hootch mates and we had a delightful snack. There were adult beverages available to us all to go with the long-traveled meal. It was a wonderful Thanksgiving/Christmas/New Years meal. None of us had ever tasted better peperoni.

Please keep the packages coming to the Troops!!!!!!

