

# Football and Friendship

In 1914 boys and young men from across the world were involved in a war. This war was known as World War I.

Many of them went to fight in France and Belgium.

The two main armies were from Britain and Germany (although the soldiers in these armies came from countries far and wide).



A sketch of a trench from World War I.

Muirhead Bone b.1876 - d.1953 'A Ruined Trench: Mont St. Eloi in the Distance', illustration from 'The Western Front', pub. by Country Life Ltd, Reproduced by The Peace Museum for educational purposes only

The soldiers had a hard time. The noise of the battle was often very, very loud. It was cold, wet, muddy, they didn't always have enough to eat and they had to dig trenches, holes in the ground, where they could shelter from the gunfire and shells. Sometimes the men and boys felt sorry for the soldiers on the other side, because they knew that they were having a horrible time too. On the 24th of December, Christmas Eve, the gunfire suddenly stopped; some German soldiers began to sing Christmas carols. The British soldiers joined in.

Eventually, someone was brave enough to climb out of their trench onto the no man's land that divided the two armies. Others followed slowly and soon men and boys from both sides were making friends, talking, sharing what little they had in the way of food and looking at photographs of each other's families.

On Christmas day the guns remained silent. Someone threw a ball onto no man's land and the soldiers began to play football. In one game a German team beat a British team 3-2! The soldiers realised that although they were from different countries, they could be friends, they were very similar, just young boys and men a long way from home, who liked the same things and wanted to play football and to live in peace, not fight a war!

Sadly the soldiers were not allowed to stay friends for long. Soldiers have to obey orders; they

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have to do as they are told by the people in charge. The gunfire started again and they quickly ran back to their own trenches.



A traditional heavy leather football

by Christos Vittoratos via Wikimedia Commons (CC-BY-SA)

The war continued, but the soldiers never forgot the game of football they shared with friends from the 'other side' on that Christmas day in 1914.



## Key Questions

Why do you think the guns stopped on Christmas Eve?

Was it a brave thing to do to climb out of the trench and go to talk to soldiers from another army?

Can anyone become friends with anyone, if they talk and get to know each other?

What might have made it hard for the soldiers to talk to each other when they met on no man's land? Did this stop them from being friends?

If we play sport or games together does it help us to become friends?

What would you have done when the guns stopped on Christmas Eve 1914?

Would you have played football on Christmas Day?