

FIRST WORLD WAR

PART FOUR: CHRISTMAS AT WAR

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A MONTHLY 12-PART SERIES TO MARK THE WAR'S CENTENARY

➤➤➤ **ALAN WAKEFIELD**
Tales of Christmas spirit in the trenches

➤➤➤ **NIGEL STEEL**
The evacuation of Gallipoli and the fate of two Smiths

➤➤➤ **MICHAEL ASHCROFT**
The first airman to be awarded a VC

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WELCOME

The Christmas Truce of 1914 has become one of the most famous events of the First World War, when British, French and German soldiers on the Western Front stopped shooting to sing carols and play football. Although such widespread fraternisation would not be repeated in the ensuing three Christmases at war, soldiers found other creative ways to celebrate the festive season, however dismal the circumstances, as the IWM's Alan Wakefield writes in this issue's lead story.

Lord Ashcroft relates the heroic story of William Rhodes-Moorhouse, the first airman to receive the Victoria Cross, and we feature readers' moving stories of the roles their family members played during the various Christmases at war.

IWM is a major contributor to this Christmas edition. The Imperial War Museum was established during the First World War and is one of the leading voices in the centenary commemorations. You can read IWM's regular features on war-time art, poetry and letters from the front, as well as pieces on two defining battles – leaving Gallipoli and gaining Jerusalem – described as “a Christmas present to the British people”.

Zoe Dare Hall
Series editor


FOES TO FRIENDS

A truce was called at Christmas 1914, when the spirit of goodwill triumphed.
Alan Wakefield
P4-5

BEER BREAK

An officer's letter home provides a moving account of food, drink and music during the truce.
Anthony Richards
P6

ON THE CARDS

A selection of Christmas cards produced by the military displaying dark humour and artistic talent.
P6-7

SUBLIME SPENCER

Stanley Spencer's remarkable painting of the mule-drawn stretchers that carried the wounded.
Richard Slocombe
P8-9

HIGH COURAGE

The story of pilot William Rhodes-Moorhouse, who dropped the war's "most important bomb".
Michael Ashcroft
P10-11

JOY AND TEARS

Allenby captures Jerusalem – but the fight against the Turks in Gallipoli had to end.
Nigel Steel P12-13

THEATRE OF WAR

How Maurice Chevalier tricked his way out of a PoW camp.
Zoe Dare Hall
P14-15

POST BOX

Your letters describing the courage, humour and sacrifice of loved ones.
P14-15

IWM PODCAST

Hear IWM's *Voices of the First World War* podcast on the Christmas Truce at www.1914.org/podcasts/podcast-9-the-christmas-truce/

Front cover: rehearsals for *Cinderella*, the Somme, Christmas 1917
Left: a Christmas message from Audit Office staff serving at the front

THE SPONSOR
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Inside the First World War, a 12-part series, is sponsored by Lord Ashcroft KCMG PC, an international businessman, philanthropist and military historian. Lord Ashcroft is sponsoring the monthly supplements because he wants to promote a greater understanding of the First World War and

to remember those who gave their lives in the conflict.

Lord Ashcroft has established himself as a champion of bravery, building up the world's largest collection of Victoria Crosses (VCs), Britain and the Commonwealth's most prestigious award for courage in the face of the enemy. He has also written four books on bravery: *Victoria Cross Heroes*, *Special Forces*

Heroes, *George Cross Heroes* and *Heroes of the Skies*. In each of the 12 new supplements, Lord Ashcroft tells the incredible stories behind First World War VCs from his collection.

Lord Ashcroft purchased his first VC in 1986 and currently owns more than 180 of the decorations. Three years ago, he began collecting George Crosses (GCs), Britain and the Commonwealth's most

prestigious award for courage not in the face of the enemy. He currently owns 14 GCs. Lord Ashcroft's VC and GC collections are on display in a gallery that bears his name at IWM London, along with VCs and GCs in the care of the museum. The gallery, built with a £5 million donation from Lord Ashcroft, was opened by HRH The Princess Royal in 2010. Lord Ashcroft has been a successful entrepreneur

for the past four decades, launching, buying, building and selling companies – both private and public – in Britain and overseas.

He is a former Treasurer and Deputy Chairman of the Conservative Party. In September 2012, he was appointed a member of the Privy Council and was made the Government's Special Representative for Veterans' Transition. He is Treasurer of the International Democratic

Union (IDU) and one of Britain's leading experts on polling.

Lord Ashcroft has donated several millions of pounds to charities and good causes.

He founded Crimestoppers (then the Community Action Trust) in 1988.

He is the founder of the Ashcroft Technology Academy and Chancellor of Anglia Ruskin University. His numerous other charity roles

include being Vice Patron of the Intelligence Corps Museum, a Trustee of Imperial War Museum, an Ambassador for SkillForce and a Trustee of the Cleveland Clinic in the US.

For information about the Lord Ashcroft Gallery, visit www.iwm.org.uk/heroes. For information on Lord Ashcroft, visit www.lordashcroft.com. Follow him on Twitter: @LordAshcroft

CHRISTMAS TRUCE

December 1914 witnessed one of the most famous events of the First World War. The Christmas Truce, as it became known, involved large numbers of British, French and German soldiers on the Western Front. Along the 30 miles of line held by the British Expeditionary Force south of Ypres, impetus for the truce came from the need to repair trenches and bury the dead.

As both sides struggled to improve living conditions, the intensity of fighting died down. As the weather worsened, both sides risked sending out working parties in daylight to repair trenches. On Christmas Eve, the weather changed with the arrival of a sharp frost, causing the ground to harden.

That evening, British soldiers noticed strange activity along sectors of the German line. Major Henriques (1/16th Londons) recalled how, as darkness fell, firing slackened and the Germans began putting up lanterns along their trenches. Soon afterwards the singing of carols and patriotic German songs was heard, which the British applauded. Men began shouting remarks across no-man's land and the night passed without a shot being fired.

With friendly relations established, more adventurous souls on each side moved the truce to another level on Christmas Day. Private Jack Chappell (1/5th Londons) wrote home that in the morning his battalion and the Germans opposite agreed not to fire. Men on both sides began showing themselves above the trenches and waved to each other. When no shots were fired, German and British soldiers climbed out of their trenches and walked into no-man's land.

In a scene repeated at many places on the front line, men met and exchanged food, drink, cigarettes, sweets and souvenirs. In some places photographs were taken and at others soldiers from both sides came together and took part in impromptu kickabouts with footballs.

There was no set formula to the truce. Much depended on what activity, if any, commanding officers allowed. On some sectors, open fraternisation continued beyond Boxing Day. Lt Dougan Chater (2nd Gordon Highlanders) wrote to his mother that the Germans opposite his battalion had requested a further meeting at New Year to see photographs taken on Christmas Day.

Units that took part in the truce usually maintained a "live and let live" attitude for as long as possible. However, the fact should not be overlooked that the truce was not universal and 81 British soldiers were killed on Christmas Day, including Sgt Frank Collins (2nd Monmouthshires), shot by a sniper after leaving his trench to take part in the truce.

The reaction of senior officers to the truce was mixed. A number issued instructions forbidding involvement, others sanctioned the event as an opportunity to carry out maintenance and bury the dead. But once such work was completed, commanders on both sides were anxious to get the war started again, fearing fraternisation would permanently affect the fighting spirit of their men.

Orders were issued at the highest level that anyone persisting with such activity would be court-martialled. Evidence suggests a number of British officers feared censure over their part in the truce and much effort was made to portray the event as an ideal intelligence-gathering opportunity. Official reports carry information on German regimental insignia, the apparent age and physical fitness of German soldiers and details of enemy trenches. Even general information gleaned from newspapers exchanged during the truce was cited as evidence of morale on the German home front.

But senior commanders need not have worried about the truce developing into a general "soldier's peace" as most taking part simply regarded it as a festive interlude in a war that had to be won.

The following year, commanders on both sides were determined to prevent a repetition. Instructions were issued that anyone fraternising with the enemy would face serious punishment.

Such concerns had foundation as small-scale but prolonged fraternisation took place between British and German infantry at St Éloi in November 1915 and on other sectors relations between opposing troops were reported as friendly.

Orders were given for artillery and machine-guns to be particularly active on Christmas Day and a number of senior officers made personal visits to the front line to check that soldiers were not engaging in any form of truce.

But such measures did not entirely stop the practice. At Laventie, units of the Guards Division fraternised with the 13th Bavarian Reserve Infantry Regiment. This incident was quickly stamped out and inquiries held at brigade and divisional level. Matters escalated and on January 4, 1916, repercussions of the event hit the 1st Scots Guards with the arrest of their commanding officer, Capt Miles Barne, and



FESTIVE FRONT
Clockwise from main picture: men of a Royal Engineers signal company plucking turkeys for their seasonal meal in 1918; Christmas dinner in a shellhole near Beaumont-Hamel, France, 1916; soldiers of the 1/5th City of London Rgt (London Rifle Brigade) fraternising with Saxons of the 104th and 106th Infantry Rgts at Ploegsteert, Belgium, on Christmas Day, 1914

Football and feasts: peace breaks out at Christmas

THE PLAN WAS TO REPAIR TRENCHES AND BURY THE DEAD. BUT THE 1914 TRUCE STIRRED HUMAN FEELINGS, SAYS **ALAN WAKEFIELD**

company commander, Capt Sir Iain Colquhoun. Barne was acquitted and Colquhoun recommended for a reprimand at court martial. Colquhoun's punishment was remitted by Sir Douglas Haig because of his previous distinguished service record.

In later years, no major truces occurred on the Western Front. The war took on an increasingly dehumanising and industrial dimension with huge attritional battles, the use of poison gas, unrestricted submarine warfare and the bombing of civilians. All this ensured there were fewer men inclined to have a friendly disposition towards the enemy.

Despite this, isolated incidents took place such as that recorded by Pte Arthur Burke (20th Manchester), who wrote to his brother on December 29, 1916, stating his unit and the Germans opposite were on speaking terms, frequently swapped cigarettes and hardly fired a shot at each other. At this time the opposing infantry were manning shell holes rather than trenches, movement was difficult and conditions so poor that the men had simply come to an understanding to make life more bearable.

Away from the Western Front, a soldier's Christmas experience often depended on the opposition he faced. In the Balkans, where men of the British Salonika Force faced Bulgarian troops, the festive season was often extended as the Orthodox Bulgarians celebrated Christmas on January 7 and both sides generally respected each other's celebrations. At the other extreme it was not unknown for Turkish forces to launch major attacks around Christmas in an attempt to catch the British troops off guard. This happened on Christmas Eve 1915 during the siege of Kut Al Amara in Mesopotamia, when the garrison

desperately fought off repeated Turkish attacks against a key part of the town defences.

Christmas was also a busy time for Army postal services handling the dispatch of letters and parcels to service personnel. The presents brought soldiers closer to family and friends at home. Typical gifts included hand-knitted socks, scarves, gloves and balaclavas, tobacco and cigarettes, chocolate and homemade cakes. The condition in which a parcel reached its destination depended greatly on the skill of the packer and length of journey undertaken.

The unfortunate Pte Frederick Goldthorpe, serving in Mesopotamia, received a Christmas cake in March 1916 only to find that the long-awaited treat was inedible, having spent three months packed in the same box as a bar of scented soap.

Alongside homemade items, many parcels contained commercially produced items. In 1915, a number of department stores including Harrods, Fortnum & Mason and Selfridges set up war comforts departments that gathered together all items a soldier on active service could possibly need. For relatives unable to visit stores in person, catalogues were produced listing items suitable for sending to men at the front. Soon it was possible to buy pre-packed "standard" boxes of food and comforts.

Harrods offered different boxes for those serving on the Western Front and in the Middle East. Regimental associations, town councils and organisations in Allied countries also provided Christmas gifts to men at the front. In December 1917, the 1/4th Royal Berkshires, serving in Italy, received £50 and gifts from their county territorial association. Additional presents for serving soldiers included chocolate and

“**THE TRUCE WAS NOT UNIVERSAL; A TOTAL OF 81 BRITISH SOLDIERS WERE KILLED ON CHRISTMAS DAY, 1914**”

soap courtesy of the Italian Touring Club. In many units, officers clubbed together to provide Christmas dinner for the men under their command. Securing sufficient food could prove a major procurement exercise involving an inventive combination of purchasing, requisitioning and pilfering.

At these dinners it was traditional for officers to wait on the men and the commanding officer usually put in an appearance to wish everyone the compliments of the season. Such events built morale and a spirit of camaraderie between officers and men. Soldiers also procured their own food for Christmas with friends clubbing together to visit local markets or trade with civilians for turkeys, geese, hens, rabbits and even goats. Some enterprising men even reared their own livestock or poultry; though this option was really only open to support units serving behind the lines.

Communal Christmas dinners were usually followed by entertainments. These could take the form of men within a unit performing musical and comedic "turns" or a visit to the local concert party. The latter produced musical revues and pantomimes, often to a very professional standard even in the wilds of Mesopotamia or the Balkans.

In Macedonia, chief among the performers were men of the 85th Field Ambulance who put on the premier shows in Salonika: *Aladdin in Macedonia*, *Bluebeard* and *Dick Whittington*. The stories and characters were frequently changed to reflect the nature of Army life in the Balkans. In the production of *Dick Whittington*, for example, the villains, Count Maconochie and Sir Joseph Paxton, were named respectively after brands of tinned stew and jam that

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FROM IWM'S ARCHIVE - LETTERS HOME

'Both sides left their trenches. The Germans brought a barrel of beer'

The day after the outbreak of war, Dr Frederick George Chandler, 29, reported to the War Office to volunteer his services as a medical officer. Receiving a commission as lieutenant in the Royal Army Medical Corps, by the end of the month Chandler was in France and treating the first casualties of the British Expeditionary Force's early battles. When he wrote to his sister Alethea on December 25, 1914, he was serving as acting medical officer to the 2nd Battalion Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders based in the trenches at Houplines, near Armentières.

"Last night was Christmas Eve. It was a bright starry moonlit night and it froze hard. Opposite our trenches was perfect quiet and soon we began to hear the shouts of our men to the Germans and their replies. Then various musical instruments began, and song and ribald mirth. One of our sergeants got out of the trench and met one of the Germans halfway. He lived in Scotland and spoke English with a Scotch accent! They shook hands and exchanged hats, the German declaring they had no wish to be fighting the English.

"Between the Welsh Fusiliers and the Germans opposite them were passed greetings and words of bonhomie, and also an intermittent fire, whereat I was sorry.

"This morning it was still freezing hard but a heavy mist was over everything... In the afternoon all firing ceased about our lines and an extraordinary thing occurred. Our men and the Germans got out of the trenches and met each other and chatted in great groups. The Germans in fact brought a barrel of beer over to the Regt on our left! One could walk about anywhere with safety - it was a most delicious feeling I can tell you. There was still some sniping going on on our right, but later on this stopped and about 6pm there was absolute quiet. It was perfectly delicious. I have not heard a quiet five minutes for nearly two months. Now, about 9pm, the singing has begun again and there is still no firing. You can't imagine how sick one gets of the crack-crack of rifles and the beastly singing noise of the bullets. I swear they are worse than shells.

"For dinner tonight we had soup, white wine, haggis, whisky and vegetables, some sort of old fowl, Christmas pudding with rum, a savoury, dry biscuits and café au rum. This morning we came across a dead German. We had him buried properly and I got a couple of buttons off the poor devil. A weird Christmas, n'est-ce pas?"

At least half of the front held by the BEF between St Éloi and La Bassée experienced fraternisation of some kind. Both sides used the opportunity not only to chat, exchange souvenirs and share food and drink, but also to improve the trenches and collect and bury the dead who had been lying out in no-man's land. Normal trench routine resumed by the end of Boxing Day and, with word of the truce having reached the higher commands, any further fraternisation was forbidden.

A few small-scale truces occurred throughout the war, but were generally quashed by orders from senior officers. In 1916, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle notably described the truce as "one human episode amid all the atrocities which have stained the memory of the war" and it is easy to regard the event now as an uplifting Christmas story promoting peace and friendship amid the aggression and horror of the First World War.

● Commentary by Anthony Richards, IWM head of documents



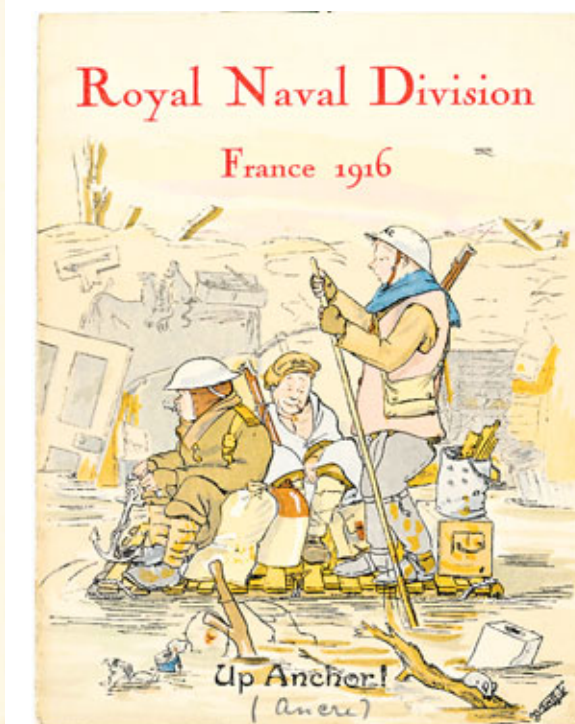
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IMAGES OF CHRISTMAS

Christmas offered soldiers a chance to forget the dangers and drudgery of military life during the First World War. Celebrations were held wherever possible in a spirit of camaraderie and with thoughts of family and friends in mind. The festive spirit is captured by the greetings cards, postcards and Overseas Club certificates from that time. Shown here are a selection of seasonal messages from Imperial War Museums' archives, compiled by Alan Wakefield and Anthony Richards.

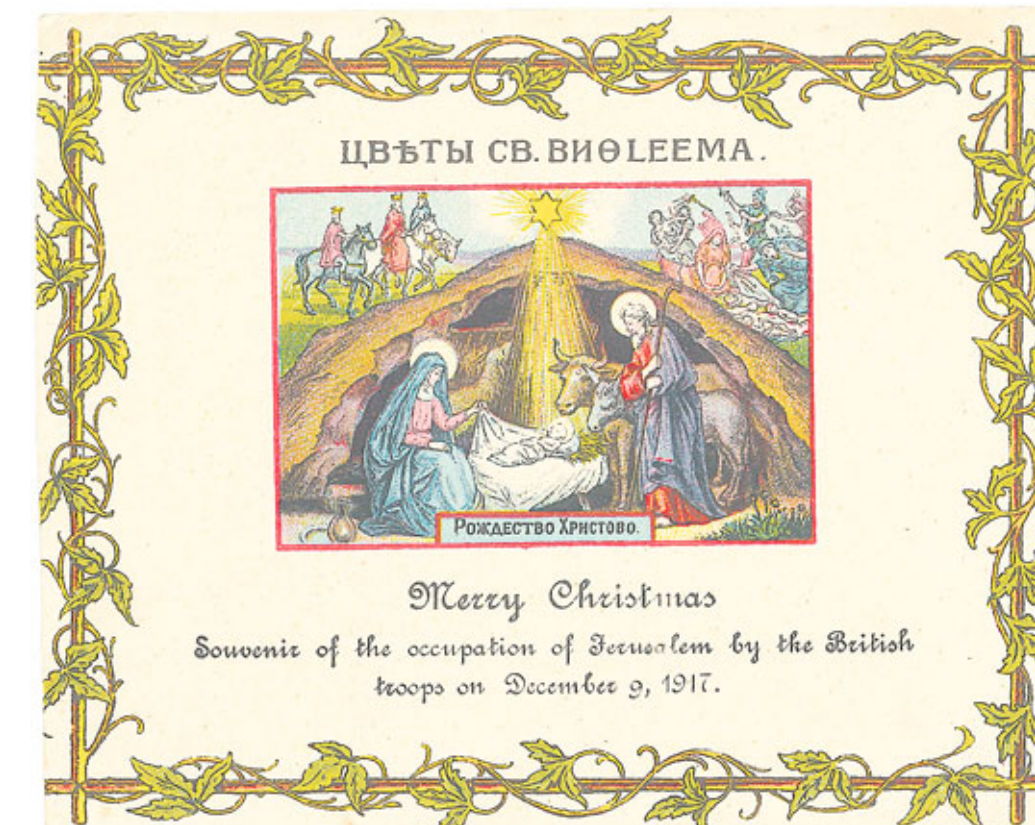
✚ A Christmas card produced by the Royal Naval Division in 1916 and hand-coloured by the sender, making light of trench conditions on the Somme that winter



✚ Certificates were presented by the Overseas Club to Empire children who sent a Christmas parcel to a serving soldier or sailor

✚ Soldiers illuminated by a Very light while crossing no-man's land in a Christmas card made by the 46th (North Midland) Division in 1917

✚ A Christmas card produced as a souvenir of the occupation of Jerusalem by British forces on December 9, 1917



NOTHING is to be written on this side except the date and signature of the sender. Sentences not required may be erased. If anything else is added the post card will be destroyed.

[Postage must be prepaid on any letter or post card addressed to the sender of this card.]

I am quite well.
I have been admitted into hospital
(wounded) and am going on well.
and hope to be discharged soon.
I am being sent down to the base.
I have received your letter dated
parcel
Letter follows at first opportunity.
I have received no letter from you
lately.
for a long time.

Signature }
only }
Date

(933) W. 11100 (1-11), 6,033,000, 10/17, H. C. & L. Ltd.

✚ Christmas was the only time personal messages could be written on field service postcards of the type shown here. The sender was usually only allowed to delete the text not applicable to his situation, sign and date the card - otherwise it would be destroyed.

ART OF WAR



STANLEY SPENCER'S 'TRAVOYS ARRIVING WITH WOUNDED AT A DRESSING-STATION' (1919)

In April 1918, while still serving in the Macedonian campaign, Stanley Spencer was approached by the British War Memorials Committee to complete a commission. The Committee was established by the Ministry of Information and charged with creating a Hall of Remembrance devoted to "fighting subjects,

home subjects and the war at sea and in the air".

Although he was aged just 27, the Committee went to particular lengths to have Spencer released from military service. Such regard stemmed from his paintings made prior to the First World War. These were often idiosyncratic, biblical subjects set in his home village of Cookham, to which Spencer was profoundly attached. Perhaps with these in mind, the Committee suggested he paint a religious service at the front, but the artist insisted instead that he should show "God in the bare real things, in a limber wagon, in ravines, in fouling mule lines".

Thus *Travos Arriving with Wounded at a Dressing-Station* (1919) captures Spencer's experiences with the Royal Army

Medical Corps' 68th Field Ambulance. In August 1919, he wrote to the Committee: "About the middle of September 1916 the 22nd Division made an attack on Machine Gun Hill on the Doiran Vardar Sector and held it for a few nights. During these nights, the wounded passed through the dressing-stations in a never-ending stream. This picture is not in any material or practical sense a truthful representation of the scene it is supposed to depict."

Indeed, Spencer interpreted the events in spiritual terms, showing the wounded as passing from the darkness of battle to the light and salvation of the improvised operating theatre. He wrote later in 1938: "I meant it not as a scene of horror but a scene of redemption." His intent was emphasised by flattened

pictorial space and the dramatic lines of the muledrawn "travos" that converge upon the field hospital window, which revealed also Spencer's admiration for early Renaissance art.

Despite the commission of over 70 paintings, the Hall of Remembrance was never realised and the completed paintings transferred to the Imperial War Museum in 1919.

● Richard Slocombe, senior art curator, IWM

● *Travos Arriving with Wounded at a Dressing-Station* will feature in IWM's *Truth and Memory: British Art of the First World War* exhibition, opening in summer 2014, along with new First World War galleries. www.iwm.org.uk

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WAR POEM

Dying not for the flag but for a dream: 'To My Daughter Betty, The Gift of God' by Tom Kettle

Thomas Michael Kettle was born in 1880 in County Dublin. At University College Dublin in 1897, he was a politically active student with aspirations for Irish Home Rule clearly inspired by his father Andrew J Kettle, founder of the Irish Land League.

Kettle qualified as a barrister in 1905 though he worked mostly as a political journalist. He won the East Tyrone seat for the Irish Parliamentary Party in 1906. As a supporter of the 1913 strike in Dublin, he published articles revealing the appalling working and living conditions of the Irish poor, a subject close to his heart.

Joining the newly-formed Irish Volunteers, Kettle was sent to Europe to raise arms, where



he witnessed the outbreak of war and acted as a war correspondent. This first-hand experience confirmed his belief in the importance of fighting for democracy.

On returning home, he volunteered to serve with an Irish regiment and, although poor health limited his role to recruitment, he continued to advocate Home Rule and for Irishmen to make a united stand against Germany. His health improved by 1916 and led to a commission into the Royal Dublin Fusiliers, with which he served in the trenches of the Western Front before being killed in action on September 9, 1916.

● Anthony Richards is head of documents at IWM

Kettle's personal justification for fighting was his belief in a moral duty to counter German militarism combined with a political desire for a "united Ireland".

Kettle married Mary Sheehy in 1909 and their only daughter, Betty, was born four years later. In a "last letter" to his wife, Kettle wrote: "My heart cries for you and Betty whom I may never see again." This poem, dedicated to his three-year-old daughter, was written four days before he died.

TO MY DAUGHTER BETTY, THE GIFT OF GOD

IN WISER DAYS, MY DARLING ROSEBUD, BLOWN
TO BEAUTY PROUD AS WAS YOUR MOTHER'S PRIME,
IN THAT DESIRED, DELAYED, INCREDIBLE TIME,
→ YOU'LL ASK WHY I ABANDONED YOU, MY OWN,
AND THE DEAR HEART THAT WAS YOUR BABY THRONE,
TO DICE WITH DEATH. AND OH! THEY'LL GIVE YOU RHYME
AND REASON: SOME WILL CALL THE THING SUBLIME,
AND SOME DECRY IT IN A KNOWING TONE.
→ SO HERE, WHILE THE MAD GUNS CURSE OVERHEAD,
AND TIRED MEN SIGH WITH MUD FOR COUCH AND FLOOR,
KNOW THAT WE FOOLS, NOW WITH THE FOOLISH DEAD,
DIED NOT FOR FLAG, NOR KING, NOR EMPEROR,
BUT FOR A DREAM, BORN IN A HERDSMAN'S SHED,
← AND FOR THE SECRET SCRIPTURE OF THE POOR.

The poem was written during the Battle of Guillemont, (September 3-6) which was part of the larger Somme offensive. Kettle served with the 9th Royal Dublin Fusiliers, part of 16th (Irish) Division, and it was while leading his men in the ultimately successful assault on the village of Ginchy that Kettle was killed.

The Easter Rising and subsequent retributions saddened Kettle, as he saw the Irish rebellion as destroying the peaceful spirit of "a free united Ireland in a free Europe". These final lines indicate his belief in a unified democracy unconcerned by national boundaries or politics.

Vera Brittain's poem *May Morning*, featured in November's *First World War* supplement, and extracts from her war diary and *Testament of Youth* are copyright of Mark Bostridge and TJ Brittain-Catlin, literary executors for the Vera Brittain Estate 1970.

VC BRAVERY

Daring flyer who braved hail of fire to drop vital bomb

MICHAEL ASHCROFT ON WILLIAM RHODES-MOORHOUSE, WHO COMPLETED HIS MISSION DESPITE MORTAL WOUNDS AND WAS THE FIRST AIRMAN TO BE AWARDED THE VICTORIA CROSS

William Rhodes-Moorhouse was not just the first airman to be awarded the Victoria Cross; his act of bravery took place in circumstances that could hardly have been more dramatic or more moving. Rhodes-Moorhouse was a pioneering military pilot at a time when even flying aeroplanes for recreation was highly dangerous. It should not be forgotten that the First World War broke out only 11 years after the first powered flight by Orville and Wilbur Wright in 1903.

By 1914, aircraft had sufficiently come of age to play an important role in the Great War but the early military flyers clambered into their aircraft with only the most primitive weapons. Most small bombs were dropped from the cockpit by hand when hostilities began. It is not surprising that the life-expectancy of early pilots was short and ample courage was needed even to climb into the slow and cumbersome aircraft, let alone perform the acts of dramatic gallantry repeatedly displayed from 1914-18.

William Barnard Rhodes-Moorhouse was born in London on September 26, 1887, into a family of adventurers. His grandfather, William Barnard Rhodes, a native Yorkshireman, was one of the first Englishmen to arrive in New Zealand in July 1836. Helped by his three brothers, Rhodes amassed a fortune from farming and other business interests. This estate of £750,000 – an enormous sum at the time – was eventually inherited by his half-Maori adopted daughter Mary Ann. She married a New Zealander, Edward Moorhouse, with whom she had four children, and their family was raised in England.

The couple's eldest son, Will, was a robust boy. He was educated at Harrow, where he developed a taste for speed and an interest in the internal combustion engine. He attended Trinity College, Cambridge, but neglected his studies because of his love of engineering and his passion for racing motorcycles and cars.

By his early twenties, Rhodes-Moorhouse was fascinated with the new sport of flying. He became an airman, attracting large crowds when he flew from Huntingdon airfield, Cambridgeshire. With a friend, James Radley, he even produced a variation of the Blériot XI aircraft – the Radley-Moorhouse monoplane. In 1911, he travelled to the United States, where he piloted a 50hp Gnome-engined Blériot to victory in many airspeed contests, earning thousands of dollars in prizes. After his return to Britain, he continued to fly competitively, ending his peacetime flying career with a record-breaking cross-Channel flight in 1912. This was shortly after he married his wife, Linda, a schoolfriend of his sister, and provided an unusual start to their honeymoon.

When war was declared, he volunteered for the Royal Flying Corps (RFC) though he had not flown for two-and-a-half years. With a shortage of experienced pilots on the Western Front, Rhodes-Moorhouse was posted to 2 Squadron at Merville, France, on March 21, 1915. His squadron flew the Blériot-Experimental (BE) 2a and 2b aircraft, designed by the Farnborough-based Royal Aircraft Factory, which were sturdy machines but with a maximum speed of just 70 mph at ground level.

Rhodes-Moorhouse flew some familiarisation sorties, but soon had his baptism of German anti-aircraft fire at 7,500ft over Lille. His logbook recorded that the top centre section of his aircraft was hit by a shell on March 29. Four days later he wrote to his wife, describing the sound of anti-aircraft fire as “first a whistle, then a noise like a terrific cough”.

Poor weather meant he had few flights in the first two weeks of April, but from April 16 he was performing numerous highly dangerous missions. During one 95-minute reconnaissance, his aircraft's wings and bracing wire were hit by shrapnel.

His service did not go unnoticed by his superiors and he was recommended for promotion to substantive lieutenant.

On April 22, 1915, the Germans unleashed their first gas attack on the Western Front and kept the initiative in battles in and around St Julien and Ypres. On April 26, the RFC was ordered to bomb the enemy's railway network to prevent reinforcements reaching the front lines. Rhodes-Moorhouse, who had been due some much-deserved leave, was instructed to bomb the strategically vital railway

A HERO IN DEED

William Rhodes-Moorhouse's Courtrai mission as depicted by artist Allan Stewart, right; Rhodes-Moorhouse, below; the flyer's gallantry awards, including the VC, far right



MARY EVANS, GETTY



“THE BRITISH COMMANDER SAID HE'D DROPPED THE MOST IMPORTANT BOMB OF THE WAR

strange dying. Blake, old boy – unlike anything one has ever done before, like one's first solo flight.” Just after 1pm on April 27, he received Holy Communion from Christopher Chavasse, chaplain at Merville, and twin brother of Capt Noel Chavasse, VC and Bar (one of only three men in history to receive the equivalent of two VCs). Then, a note arrived informing Rhodes-Moorhouse that he had been recommended for the Distinguished Service Order (DSO). At 2.25pm, with a recently delivered letter from his wife on his pillow and his friend Blake at his side, Rhodes-Moorhouse died. He was 27. In Britain, he was instantly acclaimed as a hero. *The Daily Mail* noted: “Such endurance is enough to make all of us ashamed of ever again complaining of any pain whatever. He was one of those who have never ‘done their bit’ till they have done the impossible.”

A squadron observer, Sholto Douglas, later Marshal of the RAF the 1st Baron Douglas of Kirtleside, wrote a letter to the pilot's widow: “I do hope such courage will be recognised with a DSO although we all think a VC would be none too great a reward for such pluck and endurance.” But it was largely Blake's lobbying that secured the VC, and swiftly, Rhodes-Moorhouse's award, for “most conspicuous bravery”, was announced on May 22, 1915, less than a month after his death. At the time, Field Marshal Sir John French, the British commander, said the pilot had been responsible for “the most important bomb dropped during the war so far”.

Before his mission, Rhodes-Moorhouse had written several letters to his family, to be sent in the event of his death. One particularly touching one was to his four-month-old son Willie, in which he expressed his love and affection for his wife, with whom he stressed he had never had a “misunderstanding or quarrel”. He urged his son always to seek the advice of his mother and hoped he would be an engineer and obtain “a useful knowledge of machinery in all forms”.

He also urged him to “keep up your position as a landowner and a gentleman” (the family had the 16th-century Parnham House and its estate near Beaminster, Dorset).

Then, with an affectionate farewell, William Rhodes-Moorhouse signed what he described as his “first and last letter” to his son. There was a poignant and astute postscript: “I am off on a trip from which I don't expect to return but which I hope will shorten the War a bit. I shall probably be blown up by my own bomb or if not killed by rifle fire.”

Unusually for the times, but at his own request, Rhodes-Moorhouse's body was returned to Britain where he was given a funeral with full military honours. Rhodes-Moorhouse's son became a Battle of Britain pilot and served from May 1940, at Merville, France, where his father had been killed in action 25 years earlier. After claiming 12 combat victories and being awarded the DFC, Willie Rhodes-Moorhouse's Hurricane was shot down over Kent on September 6, 1940. The body of the officer, who was 25, was recovered and his ashes were later interred beside his father at the family's Parnham estate.

I bought William Rhodes-Moorhouse's gallantry and service medals at Sotheby's in 1990 and they are on display at the Imperial War Museum in London. Also on display is the pin from the vital 100lb bomb that Rhodes-Moorhouse dropped.

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junction at Courtrai – one of three targets for just four aircraft. At 3.05 pm, he took off alone from Merville, having been asked to release his 100lb bomb from just below cloud level. However, after making the 35-mile flight, he dropped down to 300ft to ensure a direct hit. He was greeted with a volley of rifle and machine-gun fire, a burst of which perforated his aircraft's fuselage and smashed into his thigh. At the same time, fragments from his own bomb ripped through the wings and tailplane.

Badly wounded and in great pain, Rhodes-Moorhouse had two options: land behind enemy lines, surrender his valuable aircraft, receive medical attention and become a prisoner of war; or try to limp back to base with his aircraft and the valuable intelligence he had gathered. Choosing the latter, he dropped a further 200ft to gain speed and again encountered heavy fire, leading to two new wounds to his hand and abdomen. Despite his appalling injuries, he managed to steer his aircraft home, crossing the Allied lines over Indian troops who later asked for details of his courageous sortie to be translated into Hindustani.

Just three days later, the daily bulletin to the troops said Rhodes-Moorhouse's mission had been a total success and “would appear worthy to be ranked among the most heroic stories of the world's history”.

At 4.12pm, eyewitnesses saw Rhodes-Moorhouse's aircraft approaching. He just cleared a hedge, switched off the engine and made a perfect landing. Two officers lifted him from the battered aircraft, which had 95 bullet and shrapnel holes. He was taken to a nearby office, where he insisted on filing his report while his wounds were tended.

Rhodes-Moorhouse was then moved to a casualty clearing station, where it was discovered that a bullet had ripped his stomach to pieces. He was given painkillers and it soon became apparent that he was dying. Rhodes-Moorhouse showed his flight commander, Maurice Blake, a photograph of his wife and son, and asked him to write to them and to his mother. He said that if he was awarded a Military Cross (MC), then it should go to his wife.

After a short doze, he said: “It's

HEROIC STORIES

Lord Ashcroft KCMG PC is a Tory peer, businessman, philanthropist and author. The story of William Rhodes-Moorhouse's VC appears in his book *Heroes of the Skies*. For more information, visit heroesoftheskies.com

Lord Ashcroft's VC and GC collection is on public display at the Imperial War Museum in London. Visit iwm.org.uk/heroes

For more information on Lord Ashcroft's work, go to lordashcroft.com

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DEFINING BATTLES

Jerusalem: the glittering prize is won

FOR T E LAWRENCE IT WAS THE SUPREME MOMENT OF THE WAR. **NIGEL STEEL**, IWM'S PRINCIPAL HISTORIAN, DESCRIBES THE CAPTURE OF THE HOLY CITY

With food running short on the home front and the number of dead and wounded rising steadily – despite initial successes at the battles of Arras, Messines and Cambrai – 1917 was a miserable year for Britain. Almost no one remained untouched by the war.

The new British Prime Minister, David Lloyd George, was convinced that there must be a better way. He had long believed that by striking at the weaker Central Powers – Austria-Hungary and Turkey – Germany could be fatally wounded. Gallipoli had failed, and Salonika was stalled. But there remained the glittering prize of Palestine, which was steeped in biblical history and the romance of the Crusades. If the British could snatch this jewel from the Turks' Middle Eastern crown, surely, he argued, it would pave the way to victory.

Since mid-1916, the Egyptian Expeditionary Force (EEF), led by Lt Gen Sir Archibald Murray, had been moving east from Egypt across the Sinai desert. Starting at Romani in August, Murray's troops, and particularly his Australian, New Zealand and British horsemen, had confidently pursued the retreating Turks. Fighting short, sharp battles at desert oases such as El Arish and Maghaba, on January 9, 1917 they secured Rafa and crossed into Palestine.

Aware that he was advancing through country that had few natural resources, Murray cleverly ordered the simultaneous construction of a wire netting road, standard-gauge railway and a pipeline carrying water from Egypt. The speed of the EEF's 120-mile push towards Palestine was bound by the rate at which these three vital logistical elements could be built.

Once in Palestine, the EEF was confronted by the Turkish stronghold of Gaza. It was to prove Murray's undoing. On March 26, British and Anzac soldiers attacked. They started well, moving into and round Gaza. But anxiety about finding water for their horses led to a sudden loss of confidence. Murray's HQ was in El Arish, 50 miles away. Too distant to follow the vicissitudes of battle, he lost control and his troops fell back, letting victory slip through their fingers.

On April 17, Murray launched a renewed attack on Gaza. His second attempt was a fiasco. In London, Lloyd George decided a new commander of drive and vision was needed. Having fallen out of favour with Sir Douglas Haig over his conduct of the Battle of Arras, General Sir Edmund Allenby was available. Thick-set, powerful and known as "the Bull", Allenby was instructed by the Prime Minister to take Jerusalem before Christmas. Allenby arrived at the EEF's headquarters in Cairo on June 28. Immediately he began to reinvigorate his tired and demoralised



THE VICTOR

Gen Sir Edmund Allenby rides to the Jaffa Gate in Jerusalem on December 11, 1917. He dismounted and entered on foot

fiercely as they withdrew. In pursuit, Allenby's men moved in two directions. One thrust pushed along the coast towards Jaffa which was taken on November 16. Another was directed inland at Jerusalem. Allenby drove on his tired soldiers, despite the increasing strain. Even when the weather worsened in early December, the appeal of the Holy City kept them moving forward.

Acutely conscious of the need to avoid bringing Jerusalem under fire, Allenby planned to encircle the city and cut off the Turkish garrison. The first attempt to do this at the end of November failed. But Allenby boldly repositioned his troops and on the night of December 7 he struck again. Believing that the withdrawal of their forward positions was the start of a general retreat, the Turks moved out of the city and relinquished Jerusalem with little resistance. After the final capture of the Mount of Olives, the city fell to Allenby and the victorious men of the EEF.

From London, the Prime Minister and his closest advisers sent their appreciation: "War Cabinet wishes to congratulate you on the capture of Jerusalem, which is an event of historic and world-wide significance and has given the greatest pleasure to the British and other Allied people." After more than 400 years of Turkish rule, Jerusalem was once again under Christian control. It was exactly the morale

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booster that Lloyd George had hoped for to round off a difficult year.

Conscious of the city's special meaning for three of the world's great religions, in a deliberate act of humility and respect Allenby entered Jerusalem on foot through the Jaffa Gate on December 11. He walked to the Citadel from where he read a proclamation that made it clear he came not as a conqueror, but a liberator. The city too celebrated its new-found freedom.

Watching from the back of a nearby group of British staff officers was a small, strangely dishevelled young major. TE Lawrence had appeared at Allenby's HQ only days before the city's capture and had been invited to take part in the formal entry. He followed and understood all the subtleties and nuances of what Allenby did and said. He saw in the crowds the full meaning of what was happening. Years later Lawrence admitted that "for me [it] was the supreme moment of the war".

• Nigel Steel is IWM's principal historian for the First World War Centenary Programme



Gallipoli: the retreat that became a rare triumph

HOW SUBTERFUGE AND CAREFUL MILITARY PLANNING TURNED A HUMILIATING EVACUATION INTO A SUCCESS



By October 1915 it was clear, even to its most fervent supporter, that the Gallipoli campaign was over. No realistic chance remained of capturing the peninsula and reaching Constantinople to knock Turkey out of the war.

When, on October 11, the politicians in London asked the Gallipoli commander, Sir Ian Hamilton, what losses his force would suffer if the peninsula was evacuated, the outraged general defiantly replied 50 per cent. He was sacked and replaced by Sir Charles Monro (left), fresh from the Western Front.

Before the end of the month, Monro had inspected all three Gallipoli beachheads – Helles, Anzac and Suvla – and recommended they be given up. Although Winston Churchill quipped about Monro

that "he came, he saw, he capitulated", Monro was right. As the recent Battle of Loos had shown, Britain did not have the resources to fight two major campaigns in 1915. Gallipoli had to go.

While the politicians continued to prevaricate, at Gallipoli they prepared for evacuation. Beginning immediately, a preliminary stage would nightly remove all non-essential men, animals and stores. Once an evacuation had finally been ordered, over 10 nights a second intermediate stage would reduce the remaining men to the minimum number needed to hold the three positions if attacked. Once this precarious position had been reached, a final stage would lift off these last-ditchers over two critical closing nights. The order to evacuate arrived from

London on December 8, but only for the northernmost positions at Suvla and Anzac. For the time being, Helles was to be retained.

The intermediate stage began immediately. Men in the front line had been following a routine of near silence at night. Curious about this mysterious quiet, Turkish patrols edged their way forward only to be met by devastating fire from the British and Anzac trenches. The Turks learnt the hard way that quiet trenches were not necessarily empty ones.

During the day, men ostentatiously appeared in the open to make the dwindling numbers look greater, with some Australians even playing a game of cricket. Stacks of boxes on the beach were removed from the inside, leaving their outward appearance

untouched. Empty tents were left in place. The watching Turks apparently suspected nothing.

On the night of December 19, the last men marched silently to the beach and left Gallipoli without a murmur. More than 83,000 soldiers had left under the keen eyes of the Turks in just over 10 days. The first evacuation had been a rare triumph at Gallipoli – an operation that went according to plan.

To distract Turkish attention from this final night, those at Helles who were to stay behind undertook a series of minor attacks and raids on December 19. At Fusilier Bluff, on the beachhead's extreme northern point, a mine was blown followed by an infantry attack supported by parties of men armed with primitive hand grenades, known as "bombs", under the command of 2nd Lt Victor Smith, 24.

Born in Guildford, Smith moved to Burnley in 1905 when his father was appointed chief constable there. After leaving Burnley Grammar School, Smith too became a police officer. On the outbreak of war, he joined the East Lancashire Regiment and arrived at Gallipoli in May 1915. He became a specialist "bombing officer" in the late summer.

Late on December 22, as attacks started to cover

the evacuation, Smith led his "bombers" back to Fusilier Bluff. Arriving just after midnight, it had rained all day and everything was cold and wet. But Smith and his men got stuck in, arming and throwing bombs in quick succession.

Suddenly, one of the bombs slipped from Smith's hand and fell to the bottom of the crowded trench. He shouted out a warning and began to turn away. But no one else moved. He knew that within seconds the bomb would kill or badly wound anyone within range. Without hesitation, he threw himself down. The bomb exploded, killing him instantly. Only two men were slightly wounded.

Victor Smith was buried nearby in the small cemetery above Y Ravine. The news of his death arrived at his parents' home on the same day as his own postcard sending them Christmas greetings. In the new year they learnt that their son had been posthumously awarded the Victoria Cross for "his magnificent act of self-sacrifice".

After the war, the cemeteries at Helles were concentrated in locations where they could be better looked after in the years to come. Today, Victor Smith's headstone sits in the top-left corner of

GREAT ESCAPE

From far left: a field hospital at Ocean Beach, Gallipoli; preparing to burn stores at West Beach, Suvla; shelling the beaches and evacuation by raft; a print showing 2nd Lt Victor Smith throwing himself on to a bomb to save his comrades at Fusilier Bluff

Twelve Tree Copse Cemetery in the shadow of a small tree. Its Victoria Cross reminds us of his supreme act of gallantry almost 100 years ago. Under his name is the inscription chosen by his parents. It is the opening line from Tennyson's poem, *Crossing the Bar*: "Sunset and evening star and one clear call for me". Uplifting and inspiring, the words proclaim Victor Smith to be a standard bearer of the youthful "lost generation" of 1914–18.

The adjacent headstone is much simpler. Edward Smith was a plain soldier from London, killed on August 6, 1915. But his family also clearly felt that he too died carrying out his duty. Their inscription does not resonate with the grand cadences of the poet laureate, but falters slightly, almost in quiet bewilderment, remembering just the man "who died for his King, country, wife and little ones".

In the solitude of this half-forgotten British cemetery, separated by class, society and education, the two Smiths lie side by side. And yet, united in death, like two sides of a single coin, they span the divide of all those who lost their lives in the forlorn battle for Gallipoli.

Nigel Steel

WHAT DID YOU DO IN THE WAR?

Maurice Chevalier tricks his way out of PoW camp

On August 1914, a young Parisian star called Maurice Chevalier was stationed in Belfort, north-eastern France, with a year of national service to complete before he could return to where he really wanted to be – the stage. Chevalier had made his name as a singer and dancer in musicals as a child and hooked up with two of the era's biggest actresses/singers, Fréhel and Mistinguett – the latter 13 years his senior when he became her 23 year-old lover and dance partner at the Folies Bergère.

But then war broke out. "That meant putting aside my stage ambitions for a while. For how long, who could guess?" he told the journalist Percy Cudlipp in 1930 when compiling his memoirs. As an infantry private, Chevalier kept in practice by entertaining his comrades. "But when we went into the trenches, there was no more singing or dancing," he said. "Our losses were severe. One by one, my friends were killed or wounded, and I was beginning to think myself a very lucky fellow to remain unscathed."

In the first weeks of combat a shrapnel shell exploded in Chevalier's trench, hitting his chest, and entering his lung. "Then it was that, as the English Tommies used to say, I got my packet." He recalls the pain, blood oozing from his mouth, and soldiers carrying him to a village behind the lines. The next day the Germans took the village: those too badly injured to move, including Chevalier, were captured.

Chevalier was in hospital at Magdeburg before being moved to Altengrabow prison camp. "That was a bitter experience for discipline was strict," he said. He feared the injury had ruined his singing voice, but he was relieved to find he could still entertain his fellow prisoners. "just as I had done some months before, when we were all free men". Chevalier

learnt to speak English in Altengrabow from Ronald Kennedy, a teacher who had been with the Durham Light Infantry. "I suppose just as I welcomed any opportunity to sing or dance, Kennedy longed for work in which he could apply his teaching gifts. He found it by starting a class at which French prisoners could learn English. Every other day we met, and made great strides. Kennedy was a wonderful teacher, and a very real friend," Chevalier said.

But he was desperate to escape and found a way involving King Alfonso XIII of Spain, the only king of a neutral country related to both British and German royal families – and an admirer of Mistinguett. "Through the King, it had been arranged that the French and Germans should exchange prisoners who were ambulance workers," Chevalier told Cudlipp. "So I became an ambulance worker. That is, I altered my identification papers, then claimed a mistake had been made in that I should have been sent back to France. Had the deception been discovered, my punishment would have been severe."

After two years and four months as a prisoner of war, Chevalier was free. He returned to Paris and was declared unfit to carry out further war service. He was discharged and awarded the Croix de Guerre. Soon after, the theatre called – and so did Mistinguett, with whom he rekindled his stage partnership. Chevalier captured the spirit and imagination of post-war Paris like no other before, enjoying fame in London, Broadway and Hollywood. But he didn't put his wartime past behind him entirely. In the Second World War, he returned to Altengrabow to perform for the prisoners, liberating 10 people in return for his services. Chevalier died in Paris in 1972, aged 83.

Zoe Dare Hall



THE ENTERTAINER
Clockwise from left: with Mistinguett in *La Valse Renversante* (1912); the young performer c1905; with freed POWs in 1942; entertaining the troops in Lens, France, in 1939



TOP PHOTO: GETTY. © IWM (O 234)

POST BOX

We have received a magnificent postbag and inbox of letters, documents and stories in response to our request for readers' First World War memories. Here are just a few of the many we would like to share with you. Please keep them coming.

Write to: First World War, Telegraph Media Group, 111 Buckingham Palace Road, London SW1W 0DT, or email firstworldwar@telegraph.co.uk

A UNIQUE DAY IN HISTORY

Dr James Cave from Newbury, Berkshire, has a collection of letters from his grandfather's brother, Guy Cave (right) – one of four brothers who served in the Army and who, though wounded three times, lived until 1949, when he died at the age of 64.

On December 31, 1914,

when Guy (1st Bn Royal Warwickshire Regiment) was stationed at Ploegsteert, Flanders, he wrote about his company's fraternisation with the 134th Saxon Regiment.

"On arriving in the trenches on Xmas eve at night, the Germans called out greeting etc. Their trenches are about 80 yards away. We replied in our best German, wishing them a *Fröhliche Weihnachten* [Merry

Christmas]. They invited us to fetch cigars and on their promise, 'Ve veal not joot', I allowed a man to go over. He came back shortly afterwards with his cigar. He also asked for a drink but he was met with the reply, 'My officer says I must not give you drink because you must be already drunk or you would not have come...'"

The following morning, Guy woke to the sound of his sergeants singing carols. "At daybreak, we went out to the Germans who met us halfway. We made arrangements that there would be no shooting on either side during the day and Boxing Day, and this arrangement spread over our regiment, and all along the line.

"We took advantage of Xmas day to bury our dead and the German dead. We got their identification discs, so there will be definite news at home for their relatives. We had our photo taken in a group, Germans and Tommies together and

officers. The Germans have promised to bring me a print tomorrow at midnight. The regiment in front of us is the 134th Saxon, and they are fed up with the war. One rather significant remark was made by one of their officers: 'You are Anglo-Saxons, we are Saxons. Then why we joot?'"



SCARBOROUGH UNDER ATTACK

Carol Senior from Harpenden, Hertfordshire, relates a story about her husband's grandfather, Lt WE Senior RNR, who was on the minesweeper Night Hawk in the North Sea on Christmas Day 1914. "The story involved the bombardment of Scarborough by German ships in December 1914 as probable cover for the laying of mines in the North Sea," says Carol. "The Night Hawk was a former trawler from Grimsby under the command of Lt Senior. She hit a mine on Christmas Day and, from a crew of 13, seven survived, of whom Lt Senior was one. The ship went down in 10 seconds."

Lt Senior was awarded the DSC and the Croix de Guerre (May 31, 1917) for his service to minesweeping – and he became dockmaster in Grimsby. "I felt this episode

of the war was very rarely mentioned," says Carol. "In Grandpa Senior's honour, the [Croix de Guerre] sword is used at family weddings to cut the cake."

MISSING IN ACTION

Joan Dolan from Tolleshunt Knights, Essex, has spent years collecting information about her father's brother, Jack Pettit, who enlisted in the forces aged 17. By July 7, 1918, he was seeing active service and wrote to his younger brother, Tom (Joan's father): "If this war lasts much longer you will have to join up. Well, if so I will give you a hint. Join up as an Admiral. It is not such a bad job after all."

He wrote about his concerns that his girlfriend had fallen for another man and said he had applied to become a pilot. His last letter is dated August 20, 1918. After that, he went missing, "they think shot down



into the sea", says Joan. Jack's name is on a memorial to the Adriatic Group of the RAF in Northern Greece. Joan keeps a photo of him – third from right, above – and his colleagues having Christmas dinner in an aeroplane case in 1917.

'OUR FRIENDS THE ENEMY'

Bernard Brookes, 21, spent 10 months in the Flanders trenches with the Queen's Westminster Rifles. His daughter, Una Barrie, from London,

has recently published a book of his diaries, *A Signaller's War: Notes Compiled from My Diaries 1914-1918*. Here is an edited excerpt:

24.12.1914
Towards evening the Germans became very

hilarious, singing and shouting out to us. They said in English that if we did not fire they would not, and it was arranged shots should not be exchanged. They lit fires outside their trench, and sat round and commenced a concert, singing English songs to the accompaniment of a bugle band.

A Germ officer carrying a lantern came forward and asked to see one of our officers to arrange a truce for tomorrow (Xmas Day). Arrangements were made that between 10am and noon, and from 2pm to 4pm tomorrow, intercourse between the Germans and ourselves should take place.

25.12.1914

At 9am, as I was off duty, I received permission to go to Mass at a church, which was terribly shelled. There were some 30 people, and I was the only soldier. It was a unique service, and during a short address which the priest gave I was about the only

one who was not crying, and that because I did not understand much of what was being said.

I went on duty from noon to 2pm, when I partook of my Christmas fare which consisted of "bully", "spuds", Xmas pudding, and vin rouge.

In the afternoon I went out and had a chat with "our friends the enemy". The Germans wanted a partial truce until the new year, for as some of them said, they were heartily sick of the war. But we insisted on the truce ending at midnight, when our artillery sent over four shells of small calibre to let them know the truce, at which the whole world would wonder, was ended.

MY PRINCE AND THE AIRSHIP

Nellie Elliott, a 103-year-old *Sunday Telegraph* reader, writes of her wartime Christmas memories as a six-year-old living in Battersea, south London,



and watching a Zeppelin being shot down while sitting on the shoulders of an African prince.

"We had a lodger [who] was the son of an African king who had been sent to London to study. Everyone was on the streets and being quite small, my prince lifted me up on to his shoulders and this was my lasting memory of seeing an airship being shot down. Everyone was cheering but I remember being upset and wondering about the men in the ship. "My father was a C3 man – unable to go to the

trenches because of his poor health. He was assigned to looking after the mules at Aldershot. But the Army found out he was a very good cook and he was given the duty of cooking for a retired colonel who had just returned from India.

"A few days before Christmas, my father wrote to my mother to tell her not to get any food for the Sunday lunch as he was able to bring home a meal. The whole family were looking forward to this luxury. Needless to say it was a curry that was so hot that nobody could eat it other than my father and mother, so we ended up eating bread and dripping.

"One Christmas, my father was given a very grand doll's pram as a present for me. I remember my sister and brother filling it with manure and selling it round the streets to make some money for Christmas, the milkman's horse supplying the necessary resources."

NEXT ISSUE

● A world war: from Samoa and China to West Africa and India, the war spread to far-flung corners of the globe. Read about what drove men to risk their lives for such distant lands

● Please write to us with your First World War photos and memories. Write to: First World War, Telegraph Media Group, 111 Buckingham Palace Road, London SW1W 0DT or email firstworldwar@telegraph.co.uk

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LONDON

THE LORD
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GALLERY

5 KILLED TRYING. YOU'RE NEXT. HOW BRAVE ARE YOU?

PRIVATE ALFRED WILKINSON FACED THIS DILEMMA IN 1918.
HIS BRAVERY EARNED HIM THE VICTORIA CROSS.

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