



In the Battle Front The Spirit of Christmas English and Germans Shake Hands

The death is recorded in our obituary column of Drummer G. Howell, a son of Mrs. G. Bancroft, of Bradford. He deceased, who was killed on December 20th, had served for some years in the Wilts Regiments, and was aged 24.

Writing to Mrs. A. Holborn, New Road, an aunt of the deceased, Sergt.-Major C. W. Groves says:- "Having found the enclosed postcard in the pocket of No. 7416, Drummer G. Howell, I enclose it, with the sad news that he was killed in action on Sunday, December 20th. He was shot through the head at about 8.30, and lived for four hours, but never regained consciousness. We buried him in the evening, and have erected a small wooden cross over his grave, bearing the inscription: "To the memory of Drummer G. Howell, 2nd Battalion Wiltshire Regiment: killed in action December 20th, 1914. R.I.P."

"It is impossible for me to state where he was killed, but (D. V.) after the war I or someone else will be able to tell you. His death was deeply mourned by his comrades of the Battalion. Yours in sympathy, etc."

Another brother Percy Howell, writing to his aunt, gave a detailed account of how the troops with him in the trenches spent Christmas. He says: "In the first instance the Germans started the festival at about 3 p.m. on Christmas Eve, and the first we heard was the German band. They gave us a fine selection, and then they started singing. We joined in after a little while, and then got into conversation with them. By the way, they are only about 200 yards in front of us. They did not fire a round, and, of course, we were not allowed to fire either. The conversation and shouting continued all night, and at daybreak we got the surprise of our lives. They all stood on top of the trenches, and we did likewise. Then came the most surprising part of all. On the guarantee that neither side fired, they came half way and shook hands with us, and gave us cigars, etc. I can tell you they are as fed up as we are. Of course, they have to fight; they have no option, for they have to be soldiers. In front of us they nearly all talk English, and most all come from London. I can tell you, it seems good not to hear the roar of the big guns. Anyone joining us today would hardly know there was a war on, but by this time tomorrow I expect we shall have to keep our heads under, or we may stop a bullet."

After stating that he has received several parcels forwarded, Mr. Howell says: "I received a nice scarf, handkerchief, etc., from Miss Wheeler, and a box of cigarettes from Miss Adye," and at the conclusion says that many might hardly credit the truth of his story, but he assures them it is correct, and adds the Germans were as friendly on Christmas Day as if they belonged to the British Army.

Wiltshire Times and Trowbridge Advertiser, 2 January 1915