**Read the following article and point out what relevant information you gather from it you did not get from either the video or the fill-in-the-gap exercise. Write maximum 10 lines.**

Though World War I had been raging for only four months, it was already proving to be one of the bloodiest wars in history. Soldiers on both sides were trapped in trenches, exposed to the cold and wet winter weather, covered in mud, and extremely careful of sniper shots. Machines guns had proven their worth in war, bringing new meaning to the word "slaughter."

In a place where bloodshed was nearly commonplace and mud and the enemy were fought with equal vigor, something surprising occurred on the front for Christmas in 1914. The men who lay shivering in the trenches embraced the Christmas spirit. In one of the truest acts of goodwill toward men, soldiers from both sides in the southern portion of the Ypres Salient set aside their weapons and hatred, if only temporarily, and met in No Man's Land.

Restless in their trenches, covered in mud, and eating the same rations every day, some soldiers began to wonder about the un-seen enemy, men declared monsters by propagandists.

*We hated their guts when they killed any of our friends; then we really did dislike them intensely. But otherwise we joked about them and I think they joked about us. And we thought, well, poor so-and-sos, they're in the same kind of muck as we are.*

The uncomfortableness of living in trenches coupled with the closeness of the enemy who lived in similar conditions contributed to a growing "live and let live" policy. Andrew Todd, a telegraphist of the Royal Engineers, wrote of an example in a letter:

*Perhaps it will surprise you to learn that the soldiers in both lines of trenches have become very 'pally' with each other. The trenches are only 60 yards apart at one place, and every morning about breakfast time one of the soldiers sticks a board in the air. As soon as this board goes up all firing ceases, and men from either side draw their water and rations. All through the breakfast hour, and so long as this board is up, silence reigns supreme, but whenever the board comes down the first unlucky devil who shows even so much as a hand gets a bullet through it.*

Sometimes the two enemies would yell at each other. Some of the German soldiers had worked in Britain before the war and asked about a store or area in England that an English soldier also knew well. Sometimes they would shout rude remarks to each other as a way of entertainment. Singing was also a common way of communication.

During the winter it was not unusual for little groups of men to gather in the front trench, and there hold impromptu concerts, singing patriotic and sentimental songs. The Germans did much the same, and on calm evenings the songs from one line floated to the trenches on the other side, and were there received with applause and sometimes calls for an encore.

After hearing of such fraternization, General Sir Horace Smith-Dorrien, commander of the British II Corps, ordered:

*The Corps Commander, therefore, directs Divisional Commanders to impress on all subordinate commanders the absolute necessity of encouraging the offensive spirit of the troops, while on the defensive, by every means in their power.*

*Friendly intercourse with the enemy, unofficial armistices (e.g. 'we won't fire if you don't' etc.) and the exchange of tobacco and other comforts, however tempting and occasionally amusing they may be, are absolutely prohibited.*

On December 7, 1914, Pope Benedict XV suggested a temporary hiatus of the war for the celebration of Christmas. Though Germany readily agreed, the other powers refused.

Even without a cessation of war for Christmas, family and friends of the soldiers wanted to make their loved ones' Christmas special. They sent packages filled with letters, warm clothing, food, cigarettes, and medications.

On Christmas Eve, many German soldiers put up Christmas trees, decorated with candles, on the parapets of their trenches. Hundreds of Christmas trees lighted the German trenches and although British soldiers could see the lights, it took them a few minutes to figure out what they were from. Could this be a trick? British soldiers were ordered not to fire but to watch them closely.

In other areas, the two sides exchanged Christmas carols.

*They finished their carol and we thought that we ought to retaliate in some way, so we sang 'The first Noël', and when we finished that they all began clapping; and then they struck up another favourite of theirs, 'O Tannenbaum'. And so it went on. First the Germans would sing one of their carols and then we would sing one of ours, until when we started up 'O Come All Ye Faithful' the Germans immediately joined in singing the same hymn to the Latin words 'Adeste Fidéles'. And I thought, well, this was really a most extraordinary thing - two nations both singing the same carol in the middle of a war.*

In some parts of the line, representatives of each side would meet in the middle, in No Man's Land.

*We shook hands, wished each other a Merry Xmas, and were soon conversing as if we had known each other for years. We were in front of their wire entanglements and surrounded by Germans - Fritz and I in the centre talking, and Fritz occasionally translating to his friends what I was saying. We stood inside the circle like streetcorner orators.*

*Soon most of our company ('A' Company), hearing that I and some others had gone out, followed us . . . What a sight - little groups of Germans and British extending almost the length of our front! Out of the darkness we could hear laughter and see lighted matches, a German lighting a Scotchman's cigarette and vice versa, exchanging cigarettes and souvenirs. Where they couldn't talk the language they were making themselves understood by signs, and everyone seemed to be getting on nicely. Here we were laughing and chatting to men whom only a few hours before we were trying to kill!*

Some of those who went out to meet the enemy in the middle of No Man's Land on Christmas Eve or on Christmas Day negotiated a truce: we won't fire if you won't fire. Some ended the truce at midnight on Christmas night, some extended it until New Year's Day.

One reason Christmas truces were negotiated was in order to bury the dead, many of whom had been there for several months. On Christmas day, British and German soldiers appeared on No Man's Land and sorted through the bodies. In just a few rare instances, joint services were held for both the British and German dead.

Yet many soldiers enjoyed meeting the un-seen enemy and were surprised to discover that they were more alike than he had thought. They talked, shared pictures, exchanged items such as buttons for food stuffs. An extreme example of the fraternization was a soccer game played in the middle of No Man's Land between the Bedfordshire Regiment and the Germans. A member of the Bedfordshire Regiment produced a ball and the large group of soldiers played until the ball was deflated when it hit a barbed wire entanglement.

This strange and unofficial truce lasted for several days, much to the dismay of the commanding officers. This amazing showing of Christmas cheer was never again repeated and as World War I progressed, the story of Christmas 1914 at the front became something of a legend.

Source: adapted from <http://history1900s.about.com/od/1910s/a/christmastruce.htm>