

Carols, pudding and football: a letter from the trenches on Christmas day in 1914

A poignant [pojnnt – hluboce dojímavý] description of the famous Christmas Day Truce [prímerie] in 1914, when young soldiers played football in No Man's Land and German and British troops who had been shelling [ostrelovať] one another hours earlier shook hands and swapped [vymeniť] souvenirs, was bought by the singer Chris de Burgh at an auction in London yesterday.

The author is untraceable and it is not known what his fate was after the day of improbable [neuveriteľný] gaiety [veselosť], with carols, letters and presents from home, and a feast in the trenches of chocolate, oranges and hot Christmas pudding.

Historic documents experts at Bonham's auction house said the letter was a rare surviving example of a genuine original. It was clearly treasured and bears the marks of being read and reread and careful repairs to tears.

The singer bought it for £14,400 after a fiercely contested sale against 14 rival telephone bidders [záujemcov v dražbe]. De Burgh said he had a strong personal interest in the history of the first world war, in which his great uncle Thomas de Burgh was the first officer killed, and his grandfather, General Sir Eric de Burgh, served in the trenches.

The letter is headed "British Expeditionary Force, Friday December 25th 1914". It reads:

"My Dear Mater [mejtr, matka], This will be the most memorable Christmas I've ever spent or likely to spend: since about tea time yesterday I don't think theres been a shot fired on either side up to now. Last night turned a very clear frost moonlight night, so soon after dusk [súmrak] we had some decent fires going and had a few carols and songs. The Germans commenced by placing lights all along the edge of their trenches and coming over to us - wishing us a Happy Christmas etc ... Some of our chaps [maník, chlapík] went over to their lines. I think theyve all come back bar one [kromě jednoho] from 'E' Co. They no doubt kept him as a souvenir.

"There must be something in the spirit of Christmas as to day we are all on top of our trenches running about [pobíhať, šantit] ... We also had some of the post this morning. I had a parcel [balík] from B. G's Lacey Dept containing a sweater, smokes, under clothes etc. We also had a card from the Queen ... After breakfast we had a game of football at the back of our trenches! We've had a few Germans over to see us this morning. They also sent a party [brigada, čata, parta] over to bury a sniper we shot in the week ... About 10.30 we had a short church parade the morning service etc. held in the trench ... Our dinner party started off with fried bacon and dip-bread: followed by hot Xmas Pudding. I had a mascot in my piece. Next item on the menu was muscatels [masktel - muškát] and almonds [mandle], oranges, bananas, chocolate etc. followed by cocoa and smokes. You can guess we thought of the dinners at home.

"Just before dinner I had the pleasure of shaking hands with several Germans ... I exchanged one of my balaclavas [balakláva - kukla] for a hat. I've also got a button off one of their tunics. We also exchanged smokes etc. and had a decent chat. They say they won't fire tomorrow if we don't so I suppose we shall get a bit of a holiday - perhaps ... We can hardly believe that we've been firing at them ... it all seems so strange.

With much love from Boy