

Christmas in the Trenches by John McCutcheon (1984)

(I, V)

D D/C# Bm Bm7 G D/F# Em D C# B A G F# E
My name is Francis Toliver, I come from Liverpool.
A7 A7 G/B A7/C# G D/F# D D A B C# G F# D
Two years ago the war was waiting for me after school.
D D/C# Bm Bm7 G D/F# Em Em
To Belgium and to Flanders, Germany to here.
A7 A7 G/B A7/C# D D D D
I fought for King and country I love dear.

A7 A7 G/B A7/C# G D/F# D D
Twas Christmas in the trenches, where the frost so bitter hung.
Bm Bm Bm/A Bm/A G D/F# A7sus A7
The frozen fields of France were still, no Christmas song was sung.
D D/C# Bm Bm/A G D/F# Em
Our families back in England were toasting us that day,
A7 A7 G/B A7/C# D D D D
Their brave and glorious lads so far away.

I was lying with my mess mate on the cold and rocky ground.
When across the lines of battle came a most peculiar sound.
Says I, "now listen up me boys." Each soldier strained to hear
As one young German voice sang out so clear.
"He's singing bloody well y'know," my partner says to me.
Soon one by one each German voice joined in in harmony.
The cannons rested silent, and the gas clouds rolled no more.
As Christmas brought us respite from the war.

As soon as they were finished, and a reverent pause was spent,
"God Rest Ye Merry Gentlemen" struck up some lads from Ghent.
Oh the next they sang was "Stille Nacht", 'tis Silent Night says I.
And in two tongues one song filled up that sky.
"There's someone coming towards us", the front line sentry cried.
All sights were fixed on one lone figure trudging from their side.
His truce flag like a Christmas star shone on that plain so bright
As he bravely strolled unarmed into the night.

Then one by one on either side walked into no-man's land.
With neither gun nor bayonet we met there hand to hand.
We shared some secret brandy and we wished each other well.
And in a flare-lit soccer game we gave 'em hell.
We traded chocolates, cigarettes and photographs from home.
These sons and fathers far away from families of their own.
Young Sanders played the squeezebox and they had a violin.
This curious and unlikely band of men.

Soon daylight stole upon us and France was France once more.
With sad farewells we each began to settle back to war.
But the question haunted every heart that lived that wondrous night.
"Whose family have I fixed within my sights?"
'Twas Christmas in the trenches, where the frost so bitter hung.
The frozen fields of France were warmed as songs of peace were sung.
For the walls they kept between us to exact the work of war
Had been crumbled and were gone forever more.

My name is Francis Toliver, in Liverpool I dwell.
Each Christmas comes since World War I, I've learned its lessons well.
For the ones who call the shots won't be among the dead and lame,
And on each end of the rifle we're the same.