

*The Worshipful Company of
Makers of Playing Cards*



Master:
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OBE RN
2014-2015

**The Christmas Truce 1914 –
Humanity in Adversity**



The Christmas Truce was a series of widespread, unofficial ceasefires that took place along the Western Front around Christmas 1914, during World War I. Throughout the week leading up to Christmas, parties of German and British soldiers began to exchange seasonal greetings and songs between their trenches; on occasion, the tension was reduced to the point that individuals would walk across to talk to their opposite numbers bearing gifts. On Christmas Eve and Christmas Day, many soldiers from both sides independently ventured into “no man’s land”, where they mingled, exchanging food and souvenirs. As well as joint burial ceremonies, several meetings ended in carol singing. Troops from both sides were also friendly enough to play games of football with one another.



Humanity in Adversity

The Christmas truces were particularly significant because of the number of men involved and the level of their participation – even in very peaceful sectors, dozens of men openly congregating in daylight was remarkable. The truces of 1914, either those on 25 December or before the Christmas period that year, though remembered today with much sympathy, were in no way exceptions when considering similar events in the many warfare theatres that history has recorded: during many previous armed conflicts such spontaneous truces arrived probably as frequently and “magically” as it was the case during the first year of hostilities in World War I.

About the Cards

The Master’s Installation pack for 2014/15 commemorates one aspect of the centenary of the outbreak of the Great War in 1914, the Christmas Truce, under his theme for his Master’s year: Humanity in Adversity. The back of the cards depicts one of the classic images of the Christmas Truce a football match played in no man’s land between German and British soldiers on or around Christmas Day 1914. The design uses a ‘medal-shaped’ border around the image, which can also be viewed as a window on an act of humanity amongst the horrors of war. The faces incorporate a traditional design for the non court cards. For the court cards, the Kings and Queens are represented by notable figures from the four main protagonists in 1914: Britain, France, Germany and Russia. The Jacks depict a soldier from each of those four nations in a typical uniform of that period.

The cards were designed by Brad Z. Baker.

It is not true that the Germans won on penalties...



Symbolic moment of peace and humanity

The truce is often seen as a symbolic moment of peace and humanity amidst one of the most violent events of human history. It was not ubiquitous; in some regions of the front, fighting continued throughout the day, while, in others, little more than an arrangement to recover bodies was made. The following year, a few units again arranged ceasefires with their opponents over Christmas, but the truces were not nearly as widespread as in 1914; this was, in part, due to strongly worded orders from the high commands of both sides prohibiting such fraternisation. In 1916, after the unprecedentedly bloody battles of the Somme and Verdun, and the beginning of widespread poison gas use, soldiers on both sides increasingly viewed the other side as less than human, and no more Christmas truces were sought.



Live and Let Live

In the early months of immobile trench warfare, the truces were not unique to the Christmas period, and reflected a growing mood of “live and let live”, where infantry units in close proximity to each other would stop overtly aggressive behaviour, and often engage in small-scale fraternisation, engaging in conversation or bartering for cigarettes. In some sectors, there would be occasional ceasefires to allow soldiers to go between the lines and recover wounded or dead comrades, while in others, there would be a tacit agreement not to shoot while men rested, exercised, or worked in full view of the enemy.

About the Master

Captain Michael Davis-Marks served in the Royal Navy for thirty-six years. Joining in 1977, he spent his early years under the waves in the Submarine Service, where he went on to pass Perisher (the Submarine Command Course) and then took command of the hunter-killer submarine, HMS TURBULENT, which used to be affiliated to the Worshipful Company of Makers of Playing Cards. In later years, he undertook a number of shore appointments including one at the British Embassy in Washington DC and one as Director of Public Relations and finally Director of Recruiting. Since leaving the Royal Navy two years ago (Jan 13), he has become a partner in Ethos VO Ltd, a social entrepreneurship dedicated to creating businesses and solving problems collaboratively that achieve positive social and environmental outcomes as well as economic ones.

