

## The Christmas Day Truce.

### GLOUCESTER CORPORAL'S DESCRIPTION.

Mr. and Mrs. J. W. Philpotts, 56, Clifton-road, Gloucester, have received a letter from their son, Corporal James Philpotts, 1st Royal Warwick Regiment, in which he describes the Christmas Day truce on a portion of the fighting line. Writing on Christmas Day, he says:—

"We came back into the trenches last night after a four days' rest, and the Germans were in a good mood. They were singing and cheering and they wanted to come over and talk to us. Then during the night they massed a few instruments and gave us some fine tunes. They gave us, first of all, 'Home Sweet Home,' and that made us think a bit. I was thinking of three words, and I could picture home. . . . But, cheer up all, I shall be home soon. They played us some carols, and then they did us the great honour to play our 'God save the King' first, which we sang to and they cheered us, and then they played their own, which they sang to and we cheered to the echo. Then the most wonderful thing is to-day. Although there is no armistice, we have by mutual consent stopped all firing, and are going half-way to their trenches, and they half-way to meet us, unarmed, and we are changing fags and cigars and plum duff and buttons for souvenirs. We are shaking hands and chatting, and some of them close here are waiters and theatre band-players from England, and talk good English. They told the Somersets they could fetch their dead in from a charge the other day; but I will not talk of these things until I come home. I have seen it all and am still fit to fight. The Germans have the news that Russia is absolutely beaten and the French no good, but they admit we are the best fighters and the best men. They can trust us, and for a change we are trusting them, and walking about on top of the trenches in broad daylight."

Continuing his letter later, Corporal Philpott adds: "Here is Monday after Christmas, and we are still at truce. We have not fired a shot this four days. I have had some cigars, and I have two Germans' autographs for souvenirs. They say they are Saxons and near relations to us, and therefore will not fire again until we do. We are doing everything in broad daylight which we usually have to do in the dark, and then chance our lives at that. I mean fetching wood, water, vegetables and such things. I am hoping this letter will get through to you complete, because it is interesting to see the history of Waterloo and the Crimea repeating itself with the truce. Mind, it is only our lot and the Somersets at peace. If the English papers only knew, as I expect they will, it would seem to be a lie, but when I come home I can show the German autographs to prove it."

### Transcript of Source 7 Christmas Day Truce – Gloucester Corporal's Description.

Mr and Mrs. J. W. Philpotts of 56, Clifton Road Gloucester, have received a letter from their son Corporal James Philpotts, 1<sup>st</sup> Royal Warwick Regiment, in which he describes the Christmas Day truce on a portion of the fighting line. Writing on Christmas Day he says: -

'We came back into the trenches last night after a four days' rest, and the Germans were in a good mood. They were singing and cheering and they wanted to come over and talk to us. Then during the night they massed a few instruments and gave us some fine tunes. They gave us first of all 'Home Sweet Home' and that made us think a bit. I was thinking of three words and I could picture home... But, cheer up all, I shall be home soon. They played us some carols and then they did us the great honour to play our 'God Save The King' first, which we sang to and they cheered us, and then we played their own, which they sang to and we cheered to the echo. Then the most wonderful thing is today. Although there is no armistice, we have by mutual consent stopped all firing and are going half way to their trenches, and they half way to meet us, unarmed, and we are **changing fags and cigars** and **plum duff** and **buttons for souvenirs**. We are shaking hands and chatting, and some of them close here, are waiters and theatre band-players from England, and talk good English.

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German soldiers pose for a picture during the truce. Picture from Gloucestershire Archives.





## HOW TO MAKE A CHRISTMAS CAKE IN A BAKED BEAN TIN!



**Plum Duff** as mentioned in the Christmas Day Truce article was a great favourite of many people. Much like Christmas pudding today, it was rich, sweet, very fruity and heavy. It was shaped into a mould or ball and then wrapped in calico cloth to be easily stored for a very long time until needed. No wonder several of them found their way out to the front line!

Lots of old fashioned recipes exist, but have a go at something similar and a bit more modern with this recipe for 12 mini Christmas cakes cooked in baked-bean tins.



### Mini Christmas Cakes

**Equipment:** 12 well washed and dried small baked bean tins with the ring pull tops removed. Parchment paper for lining. String.

#### Ingredients:

200g glacé cherries	50g whole almonds	Marzipan to decorate
500g mixed dried fruit	2 tsp mixed spice	Ready to roll icing
500g sultanas	1 tsp ground cinnamon	Apricot jam to glaze
zest of one orange	225g plain flour	
200ml orange juice	4 large eggs, lightly beaten	
225g butter, softened	225g dark brown sugar	

- 1) Put cherries, dried fruits plus zest in bowl and soak in orange juice overnight.
- 2) Line the little bean tins. Lightly grease the base and sides. Line sides with a double thickness of baking parchment that stands 5cm above tin. Make 1 cm cuts at base to help it lie flat. Line the base with a double layer of parchment.
- 3) Preheat oven to 150°C. Beat butter and sugar for 5 min till light and fluffy. Whisk in eggs slowly. When almost added, whisk in some flour to stop it curdling. Fold in flour, spices, fruit and almonds. Spoon into lined tins and make a small dip in the middle of the mixture. Wrap tins in a double thickness of parchment and tie with piece of string. Cook for 25-30 minutes. If you want the top of the cakes to brown a bit more untie the string, so the top of paper is open, for the last quarter an hour.
- 4) Once cooked, poke lots of holes in the top of the cake with a skewer and drizzle a teaspoon of orange juice over the cake. Don't overfeed it or the cake will go too soggy. Leave to cool in tin. Then remove from tin, remove paper and wrap well in a clean lot of a double layer of greaseproof paper and foil to store.
- 5) When ready to serve, brush the cake tops with melted apricot jam then cover first with a disc of marzipan cut to the diameter of the cake and then a same sized disc of ready to roll icing. Add a sprig of holly or silver balls to finish.