



The Christmas Truce 1914: Courtesy Illustrated London News - by A. C. Michael - The Guardian

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Holiday Cards of the Great War Sent Home

By Members of the MPHS

A challenge was issued to the MPHS membership in issue numbers 2 and 3 of 2015. To say that “Every cloud has a silver lining”, would be to understate the response! For, in fact, the adage “When it rains, it pours,” would aptly describe the enthusiasm that marked the solicitation—namely, *show us the variety of Christmas and Holiday cards used by the soldiers of the fighting forces serving in Europe in the Great War.*

While the fighting continued along the various fronts, military formations, individuals and service organizations took time to memorialize the religious and secular holidays reflecting their ethnic and national identities. During the first year of fighting, the famous one day “Christmas ceasefire” initiated by members of the warring forces of Britain and Germany on the Western front was a dramatic reminder of the importance of those traditions.

The response of our readers was magnificent, and in fact overwhelming. In the next several pages, examples are presented—together with their postal history where practicable—of the cards sent home by those soldiers. The donors of the cards are cited in Appendix A.



Figures 1 & 2: Christmas card - The commander of the U.S. 79th Division reminded his officers and men that the “Dawn of Peace” has come after two years away from home.

Continued on pg. 4

PLEASE NOTE: To encourage writers, promote lead articles and touch upon the wide ranging interests of our members, new lead articles will always appear on the cover page, while second and third parts of prior issue lead articles can be found several pages into an issue. There is no continuation of a second part to the previous issue’s lead article this month.

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Figures 3 & 4: Christmas postcard & envelope supplied by the YMCA. Pvt. Oley Gillespie writes his sister in West Virginia that “the hills are covered in snow,” in November 1918 while serving with the Command and Control Center of Battery A, 66th Artillery. Lt. Bagwall was the regimental censor.



Figures 5 & 6: Submitter’s translation: “The Society of the Knights of Columbus is happy to tell the little children of Lorraine best wishes and friendship on the occasion of the first French Christmas—the first Christmas of Victory” from the Minister of War and the Alsace Bureau of Studies in December 1918

The completely unexpected number of such holiday cards (78 by 9 contributors) prompted the editor to re-approach the matter of presenting all holiday cards. We hope to develop a webpage on the MPHS website but that has not been fully resolved as we began experiencing input problems. A list of the cards presented in this first part is shown in **Appendix A**. An electronic file containing all images is available upon request from lugopspe@q.com.

The submittal of scans of such cards revealed several things about them:

1. Many were addressed to young daughters and sisters. Typically, the mailing envelope/cover was retained in these cases as treasured mementos of father or brother;
2. In many cases, the envelope/cover was not retained.
3. Many cards & post cards were inserted into envelopes.
4. Surprisingly, many cards were created by military units for the men in their ranks—either to thank them for their service or for them to use in writing home.
5. The service organizations used the holidays as occasions to distribute many card varieties to soldiers.
6. Shown here are cards (to be inserted in envelopes), postcards (could be mailed without envelopes) and special cards and paper ephemera items. .

Even with the responses received by MPHS members, we suspect that many more such cards can be found—particularly for the armies of the Alliance powers. Whether such is the case remains to be seen, but we also believe a good start has been made in identifying the varieties that remain in existence.

As to their postal history, a number of markings, cancellations, dates, units and addressees can be found. Where that information could be identified in the submittals, that information is provided. Typically, as is the case with most war-time correspondence, details in the correspondence is skimpy, brief, and basically non-descriptive.

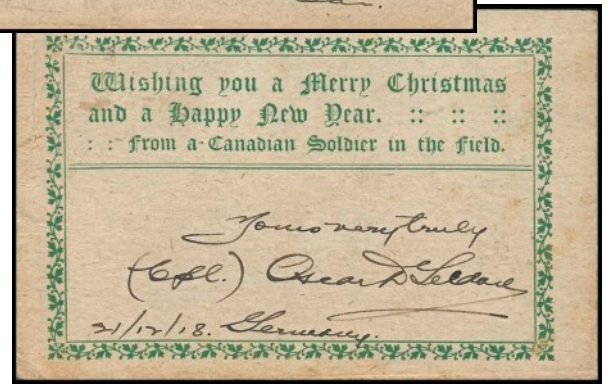
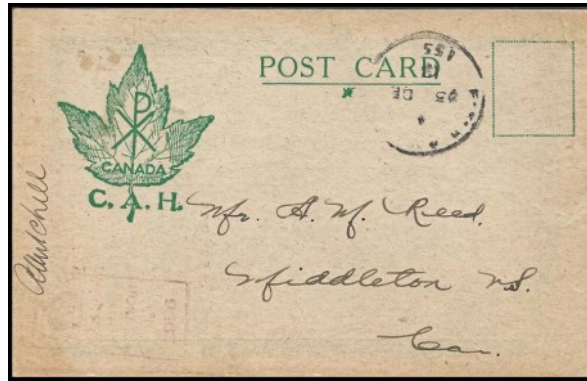


Figure 7: 1918 card insert produced by the YMCA. Cover not shown



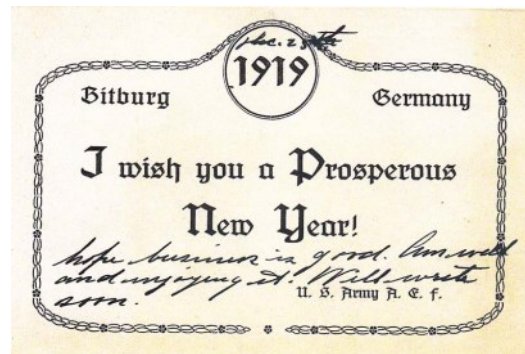
Figures 8, 9, 10, 11 (at left): Many cards exist without any indicia of their respective postal histories.

Figure 8: Contributed by Alan Lauer, the Engineer corps of Canada, U.S., and France are represented in this Parisian card
 Figures 9 and 10: YMCA card, produced by Devenpart, Paris. Bill was writing from the 147th Infantry at APO 763
 Figure 11: November 1918 card insert produced by YMCA, printer Draeger



E. Kie.
 Wishing you a very
 Happy New Year and
 Hoping to see and
 be with you soon.
 Hope to be with you
 by Easter. Bill
 Co. G. 149th APO 763.

Figures 12 and 13 Knights of Columbus postcard distributed to Canadian Armed Forces.. Used by Cpl. Oscar LeDare on December 21, 1918, while stationed in Germany to write to Middleton, Nova Scotia. British censor. The salutation ends with the phrase “in the ‘field’” Another KofC card ends with “In England”.



Figures 14 and 15: Cpl. Lochman of the 561st Pioneer Infantry (engineering infantry) writes Mr. Harvey at the clock shop of Lancaster, PA. from APO 761 in Bitburg, Germany for the 1919 New Years.



Postcards, as opposed to Christmas cards inserted into envelopes, were very popular—for their ease of transmission. Many exist, unused, or written upon and enclosed in an envelope, or simply sent through the mails.



Figure 16: The 143th, 144th, and 145th Trench Mortar Batteries (TMB) were part of the 48th (South Midland) Division, an infantry division of the British Army. The division saw action on the Western Front, then was transferred to the Italian Front in November 1917 where it remained until 1919.



Figures 18 (above) and 19 (below): Corporal Harry Smith sent this otherwise unidentifiable YMCA postcard to his grandparents. Not to be overlooked was the U.S. Navy, in what appears to be a YMCA Christmas or New Year's greeting card of 1918, printed by Draeger.



Figure 20: Clarence of the 68th Engineers was writing to his sister on November 25th wishing her a Merry Christmas. The YMCA card was also printed by Draeger, but designed by Rene Vincent. The envelope for this card, has long since disappeared.



Figure 17: The postcard was sent in December 1918 by Harry Adkins with the 364th Infantry Band, APO 776, 91st Infantry Division. The unit served with the British Army, as suggested by the cancel over the shield and British censor marking, superimposed by the U.S. Army M.P.E.S. cancel.

Postcards could be easily reproduced in localities near the fighting, used by the units themselves or by service organizations. The fighting units appear to have preferred such postcards, as opposed to cards inserted in envelopes—probably because of their economy. Service organizations, such as the Knights of Columbus,





Figure 30: This YMCA card was designed by Jacques Carlu. The card was addressed to Mrs. Thomas Farley of Fall River, Massachusetts, but the envelope is gone

Insofar as the figures are concerned, thus far a review of military unit or Christian Christmas cards have been presented. Among other major faiths, the only similar holiday cards for December that have been found were published by the Jewish Welfare Board.

Roughly 225,000 Jews served in the armed forces of the United States in WW I. They represented nearly 5% of the number mobilized. It is not known what the percentage, or numbers, of Jews were that served in the British, French, German, Austro-Hungarian or Russian armies. We suspect that those percentages were higher than in the U.S. Army in the case of the Russian, Austro-Hungarian and German armies, but considerably less for the armed forces of other belligerents (e.g. the Italian armies.)

In the case of the U.S., the Jewish Welfare Board for Soldier and Sailor Relief (JWB for short) became the chief social welfare agency working with the U.S. military on behalf of **all** American servicemen, with the needs of Jewish servicemen as their particular focus. The JWB carried on an extensive two year+ program of services, both in the U.S. and overseas, with the A.E.F. In the case of holiday mail, however, their contributions were limited, and the authors have only been able to pinpoint two examples of such mail during the 1918 holiday period. These are illustrated in **Figures 25 & 26 and 31**.



Figure 31: This JWB Hannukah postcard was not used overseas, but rather stateside. Sgt. R. Issacamat Camp Greene, Charlotte, North Carolina was writing to Miss Esther Handelsman of Philadelphia, PA. on November 27, 1918. Anyone care to translate?

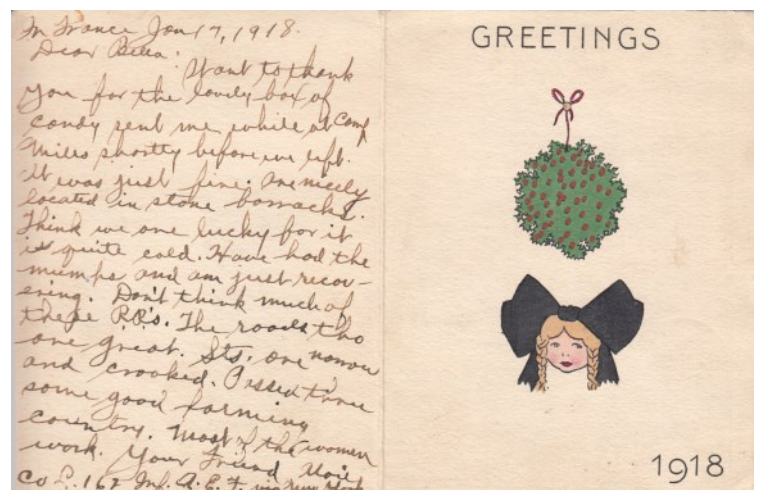
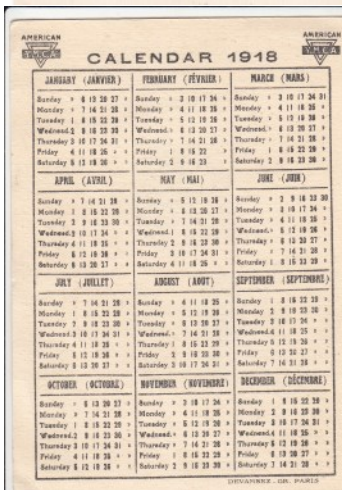


Figures 32 and 33: Writing from England, Mac had had a good visit to the British Isles, but was soon off to action in France. with Co. C, 317th Machine Gun Battalion, after July 12, 1918. His regimental censor was at work on a card commemorating the leaders of the B.E.F. and the A.E.F. .

A postcard variant were the two sided bi-fold cards. Usually printed on both sides, the only way to mail them was in envelopes, but unfortunately the latter no longer survive in the sample holdings of the authors. Unlike many other WW I cards and souvenir ephemera material,



Figures 34 & 35: The Czech Legion in Siberia. Cancelled by Czech Legion FPO 3 and the message is dated 24 December 1919, sent by a Legionnaire in Irkutsk, Russia (upper right of message). The Legion "franking" contains two of the four Legion stamps that really were not required on "free" mail. They appear to be from the issue's reprint (when the Legion returned to Czechoslovakia, 1919-20). The card apparently was prepared while in Russia, but franked/cancelled by the field post service when it was brought back for delivery in Czechoslovakia.



Figures 36 & 37 Figure 36 is unused, while 37 is a YMCA card (similarly without a cover/envelope) used in January 1918 by doughboy Aloise of the 162nd Infantry, 41st U.S. Infantry Division (APO 727). He had been battling the mumps after his recent arrival from New York. He was bivouacked in stone barracks, and didn't like the railroads,

such cards in our possession were solely products of commercial printers. They sought to profit from cards that humorously portray the fighting and calendars that could be used to track the time remaining in 1918 or 1919 before the sender's return. **See Figures 36 & 37.**

As previously noted, the numbers of cards received were so numerous that a specific webpage dedicated to holiday cards is being designed for future release by the MPHS. We know you can appreciate the amount of time expended by volunteers to design and develop the webpage and include those many scans, while encountering unexpected glitches. Look for the announcement (and release) of the webpage as early as issue # 1 of 2016 (to be issued approximately **February 10, 2016**). **IN THE MEAN-TIME, MAY ALL OF YOU HAVE WONDERFUL HOLIDAYS, A Merry Christmas, and a philatelically rewarding New Year.**

Sergio Lago



Figure 38: Used, German Christmas Greetings 1917