

**SCOUTS-L**

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**CHRISTMAS  
MESSAGE 1996**

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**From:** "Michael F. Bowman" <mfbowman@CapAccess.org>  
**To:** SCOUTS-L - Youth Groups Discussion List <scouts-l@tcu.edu>  
**Subject:** Peace Be With You All and Hope for a Wonderful New Year  
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Eighty-one years ago today Europe was being convulsed by a terrible war with shocking casualties on both sides. By Christmas Eve in 1915 both sides had become well practiced in trench warfare. In many ways it was a grim time and for many it seemed that hope was lost.

Yet on that night, a young German soldier somewhere along the line in France sang out the words of a Christmas carol in his native tongue. Others joined in and the canons and guns fell silent as all strained to hear in a brief respite from the war. In answer an English soldier from Kent and his comrades sang God Rest You Merry Gentlemen. The Germans began singing Stilla Nacht (Silent Night) and the lads from Kent joined in singing in English.

As the carols continued to fill the night in two tongues, another young German soldier advanced unarmed across no-mans land with a flag of truce. And one by one the men on both sides advanced unarmed into no-mans land where they traded cigarettes, chocolates, and stories. Some played soccer under the light of star shells and others brought musical instruments to share in song.

In that brief night the frozen fields of France were warmed by the songs of peace and hope. The First World War continued on for three more years, and though not repeated again, this night was well remembered by all.

Some would later describe it as miraculous that there was such a spontaneous laying down of arms among the soldiers. Others saw it as evidence that even in the worst of times, we could still find a way to

be able to live in peace.

In my own religion's celebration of Christmas it is customary to exchange happy greetings and the glad tidings of Peace on Earth and Goodwill to All Men. And as I consider the meaning of these tidings, it seems to me that it is also a time to remember that another soldier whose fame was from an earlier time was also hopeful that we might find a way to have peace on earth and to have goodwill among all. Baden-Powell with death approaching left a series of four letters to be opened after his passing. In his letter addressed to brother Scouters and Guiders when the world was again convulsed in a World War, he described the aim of the movement he had started:

"Its aim is to produce healthy, happy, helpful citizens, of both sexes, to eradicate the prevailing narrow self-interest, personal, political, sectarian and national, and to substitute for it a broader spirit of self-sacrifice and service in the cause of humanity; and thus to develop mutual goodwill and co-operation not only within our own country but abroad, between all countries.

"Experience shows that this consummation is no idle or fantastic dream, but is a practicable possibility -- if we work for it; and it means, when attained, peace, prosperity and happiness for all. . . ."

And so I would ask all of you to take inspiration from the Christmas Eve experience in 1915 and BP's dying words to recognize that among us all there is hope for peace and goodwill among all made more real by the love we share for Scouting and Guiding around the globe.

Perhaps the greatest gifts exchanged during the year are the ones each of you give to the young people you serve daily and weekly in Scout or Guide meetings and activities. My thanks to all of you who have shared around this virtual campfire over the last year and for all the wonderful things you have done to deliver the promise of Scouting to young people. Peace be with you all and may you enjoy a wonderful new year full of challenge and joy.

Speaking only for myself in the Scouting Spirit, Michael F. Bowman  
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