

# WESTERN FRONT ASSOCIATION, LANCASHIRE NORTH BRANCH

DESPATCH: November 2017 - Supplementary Information

## MONUMENT TO FRATERNISATION. - Neuville Saint Vaast

### TRADUCTION ANGLAISE

#### Monument to fraternizations

Enemy soldiers dared to behave as brothers  
From October 1914, the First World War became bogged down in a War of Positions. Buried in trenches, facing each other just a few metres apart, the soldiers of both camps fought one another in inhumane conditions during repeated and bloody assaults.

When exceptional circumstances arose, like Christmas Eve 1914 or the floods of winter 1915, British, French and German soldiers put down their weapons and came together to share a few short hours of peace.

#### Eye-witnesses tell the story

These fraternizations occurred at various locations along the front. The soldiers' accounts describe the triggering role of shared songs, the warmth of the burning candles, the exchanges between the camps but also the refusal of some and the harsh return to reality. On 10 December 1915, close to this spot, the French corporal Louis Barthas described it in this way:

«The common suffering brings hearts closer, melts away hatred, nurtures sympathy between different people, even enemies. Frenchmen and Germans looked at one another, saw that they were the same people. They smiled at each other, exchanged words, hands were proffered and grasped; we shared tobacco, a quart of juice or ration wine.»

Conscious that these forbidden gestures would be condemned, he made the vow that one day, it would be possible to recognise their positive value and commemorate them just as the battles and deaths are commemorated.

#### A monument for peaceful fraternization

One hundred years later, these moments of humanity between enemies are at last seen as manifesting a desire for international fraternity. Eye-witness accounts, the work of historians and journalists, the film *Joyeux Noël* (Merry Christmas): each in turn has carried this message.

In 2015, the Urban Community of Arras, the Association Noël 14 and the Regional Council of Nord-Pas-de-Calais have mustered the energies necessary to commemorate this fraternal impulse.

Like glimmers of hope, colourful and bright silhouettes await as you, too, emerge from a trench to fraternize with them, in the centre of a garden inspired by the cultures of the various nations reunited today.



German, British and French soldier figures at the centre of the monument with the huge La Targette French National Necropolis in the background

#### A German soldier tells the story

##### In August 1915, in the Vosges

« After days of exchanging grenades to no avail, we made an agreement with the French not to fire while we waited to be relieved. We took advantage of the lull to strengthen our lines. Gradually, we peered above the parapet, in broad daylight, to find ourselves the object of innocent stares.

Thereupon, we exchanged cigarettes, money, newspapers, letters...

If it was down to the soldiers opposite, the armistice would have been signed long ago. We, too, hope that it will not be long in coming. »

#### A French soldier tells the story

##### In December 1915, not far from here

« Caked in the same crust of mud, the two armies looked at one another with curiosity, just 50 metres apart.

The rifles were no longer fireable and we were all busy fighting against our common enemies: water, rats, the cold...

Suddenly, a German walks towards us and gestures us to come closer. He is not carrying a weapon.

One of my men moves forward to meet him.

I order him to come back but he takes no notice. When standing face to face, the two adversaries shake hands and chatter to one another, each in their own language, gesturing wildly. »