

Changing the “War No More” Sentiment of Armistice Day to the War-Glorifying Propaganda of Veterans Day

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99 years ago, on 11-11-1918, at precisely 11 am Paris time, a cease-fire (aka “truce” or “armistice”) was agreed to and signed by military negotiators from France, Britain and Germany. The terms of the truce ultimately resulted in the end of the “War to End All Wars” 7 months later when the Treaty of Versailles was signed on June 28, 1919.

Germany’s surrender to the Allies was regarded as the prudent thing to do after Kaiser Wilhelm’s tyrannical monarchy was overthrown by democratic socialist forces earlier in 1918. Erich Ludendorff, a classic example of Prussian militarism, was one of the German generals who first broached the idea of starting the negotiations that eventually led to Germany’s surrender.

Ludendorff saw that

- 1) Germany’s army was terminally exhausted, demoralized and poorly equipped;
- 2) the United States had finally entered the war with fresh troops;
- 3) the fledgling government at home was in disarray;
- 4) the war had bankrupted the nation (as all wars eventually do – unless there is enough looting and plundering of the occupied territories);
- 5) that civilians at home were starving; and
- 6) that victory was an impossibility. The writing was on the wall; Germany had no choice but to surrender.

The armistice was signed at Compiegne, France by four French and British military officers, the German Foreign Minister, two German military officers and one German civilian.

According to the terms of the armistice, Germany agreed to immediately evacuate all occupied territories within two weeks and to surrender 5,000 cannons, 25,000 machine guns, 1,700 planes, and all German submarines. All Allied prisoners of war were to be released by Germany immediately, but German POWs were not to be released until a peace treaty was signed sometime in the future.

Ever since November 11, 1919 – one year after the signing – Armistice Day has been observed as a national day of remembrance in all Allied nations. It is called Remembrance

Day in the United Kingdom and Armistice Day in the United States. Traditionally, 2 minutes of silence are observed at exactly 11 am.

For decades after the end of World War I, November 11 was intended to be a day of mourning and repentance for the satanic carnage that the up to 14 million dead combatants plus the hundreds of millions of wounded combatants and secondarily traumatized civilians had suffered.

The senselessness and stupidity of that war should have resulted in the courts-martial of every gung-ho officer and the demeaning of every war-mongering politician the de-certifying of every war-profiteering corporation that thought the war was worth engaging in. But it did not. The war-mongers and war-profiteers just went into hibernation.

But the war did result in the dissolution of four empires, their emperors and kings, and the assorted aristocrats and sycophants who had been so cruelly ripping off the multitudes of poor people for so many centuries. The four empires that collapsed were the German, Austro-Hungarian, Russian and Ottoman empires. And good riddance it was.

Of course, Germany DOES NOT celebrate Armistice Day, because that November 11 and the date of the signing of the Treaty of Versailles (that ended the war) were irrationally regarded as the dates of treasonous acts that had been committed by Germany's new civilian democratic leaders who signed the documents - holding blameless the German military officers who suggested that the German army surrender in the first place.

11/11/18 was despised by patriotic "Deutschland Uber Alles" Germans, especially the right-wing, pro-monarchist, proto-fascist and "Germany First" nationalists who repeatedly used the "Stab-in-the-Back" and "November Criminals" deception to weaken and then overthrow the Weimar Republic's experiment in democracy. After 12 years of pro-war propaganda from militarists like Adolf Hitler, Ludendorf and the Nazi Party, democracy never had a chance, especially with all the economic turmoil that began with the unaffordable, poverty-inducing militarism, the war, inflation and the unemployment that came with the US Wall Street crash of 1929 - which affected the whole world.

The "Stab in the Back" and "November Criminals" Myths That Scape-goated Hitler's Leftist Enemies

According to WikiPedia, the "Stab-in-the-Back" Myth is the notion, widely believed and promulgated in right-wing, pro-militarist circles in pre-Nazi Germany, that the Imperial German Army did not lose World War I, but rather, the German military had been betrayed by the civilians on the home front, especially the pro-democracy groups that overthrew the tyrannical monarchy during the German Revolution of 1918-19.

The year after the war ended, most of the national leaders that considered themselves victors proclaimed November 11 to be Armistice Day or Remembrance Day, and they ordered all businesses to briefly stop doing business for two minutes and stand in silence at exactly 11 AM, expecting all citizens to ponder the meaning of war's horrors and to pray that there will never be another war.

In 1926 the US Congress passed a resolution declaring that Armistice Day should be a day of *"thanksgiving and prayer and exercises designed to perpetuate peace through goodwill and mutual understanding between nations."*

In 1938 the US Congress made Armistice Day an official holiday that was explicitly dedicated to perpetuating world peace.

Dwight Eisenhower, the CIA and Omar Bradley: Their Contributions to the Evolution of US Militarism

And then, in June of 1954, US President Dwight David Eisenhower signed a bill changing the name of Armistice Day to Veterans' Day. The stated purpose of the new holiday was "*to thank all veterans who had served the United States of America.*" Simultaneously, in the post-WWII years when the rest of the planet had had much of its infrastructure destroyed by the war, the US was sensing that it could easily establish a powerful global empire. The CIA was feeling its oats and the Department of War was name-changed to the Department of Defense. Planetary, full-spectrum military and economic dominance by the US was a possibility. But the military and economic powers that be in the US knew that the two powers needed to work in tandem.

And just like that, as has been the case of so many other pro-war propaganda tools, anti-war and pro-peace sentiments had to be suppressed. Peace-loving holidays like Mother's Day, Memorial Day, Armistice Day and Labor Day needed to be de-emphasized or co-opted.

And so they were. The process was so subtle that the public never flinched. America's under-appreciated or wounded military veterans applauded for they seemed to appreciate being thanked for their service, even if most of them resented the empty sentiments.

One of the (perhaps intended) consequences of the gradual change away from the emphasis on peace was the amnesia over the horrors of war and the blindered glorification of war. Both adults and children were easily brain-washed into mindlessly glorifying the diabolical. Keeping America militarily strong was emphasized.

In his Armistice Day speech in 1948, General Omar Bradley famously accused those entities that placed their trust in military dominance. He said:

"We have grasped the mystery of the atom and rejected the Sermon on the Mount. The world has achieved brilliance without wisdom, power without conscience. Ours is a world of nuclear giants and ethical infants. We know more about war than we know about peace, more about killing than we know about living."

The military and economic entities that are in control of the world didn't take Bradley's admonition seriously.. Most Christian churches failed to see the truth in the statements. In the halls of Congress and in the White House ever since WWII, there is no consideration of the cruelty, stupidity and futility of war. On Veterans Day in America today no one is sincerely praying or working for a real sustainable peace, even during the obligatory 2 minutes of silence.

In our corrupt capitalist society there is just too much money to be made by war-profiteering corporations and wealthy investors when there are potential military conflicts brewing. The stocks of war industries surge when Donald Trump tweets about bombing foreign nations. And then there are legions of major media outlets that are always ready and willing to cheer-lead for wars and rumors of war.

Just like America's habit of glorifying select aspects of the criminal Vietnam war, Australia has been infamously and irrationally going overboard honoring a shameful military episode in their past history.

Every April 25, Australia celebrates what they call ANZAC Day (Australia and New Zealand Army Corps), for on that date in 1915, rookie Australian and New Zealand soldiers engaged in a British war for the first time in their histories. On that day, tens of thousands of obedient "down under" troops, all of whom had pledged allegiance to the King of England, started an amphibian assault against Turkey, a World War I ally of Germany.

On that day, thousands of doomed ANZAC troops suffered a humiliating massacre when, led by an inept and arrogant officer corps, they all obeyed their orders to invade Turkey's Gallipoli peninsula. The intent was to establish an Eastern European Front in the war against Germany.

With no logistical intelligence of the terrain of the Gallipoli landing zones, the green troops were butchered by the thousands by Turkish rifle and artillery fire. The ANZAC troops were totally unaware that Turkish soldiers had been waiting for them on the well-protected ridges above the beachhead.

For the rest of the botched invasion, the ANZAC troops were forced to hunker down on the beach - sitting ducks for snipers (except for the frequent, suicidal, "over-the-top" assaults into "no-man's land" where Turkish machine gun fire methodically mowed them down. The hard lessons of trench warfare on the Western Front in France had not been learned.

The Gallipoli fiasco was ignominiously terminated eight months later, with troops fleeing the landing zones in the middle of the night, with most of the "fallen" left behind. Australia's sorrowful and antiwar November 11 Remembrance Day has, just like in most other militarized nations, devolved into just another pro-war, pro-militarism, celebratory ANZAC Day that has forgotten the lessons of war. As one Australian truth-telling blogger wrote recently:

"There are now two days (a year) to glorify the warriors and their wars, and none to remember the stupidity and the futility of war. It is not surprising that today we are at war continuously, somewhere, even though time and time again they are based on lies and solve nothing."

Eric Brogle, the singer/song-writer who wrote the powerful antiwar song "The Band Played Walzing Matilda", understood well what used to be the real meaning of Remembrance Day - or even ANZAC Day. The lyrics are further below, but these few excerpts need to be taken to heart:

"Then a big Turkish shell knocked me arse over head. And when I awoke in me hospital bed and saw what it had done, I wished I was dead. I never knew there was worse things than dying...I see the old men all tired, stiff and worn those weary old heroes of a forgotten war. And the young people ask: "What are they marching for?" And I ask myself the same question."

At the end of this column are the lyrics to John McCutcheon's "Christmas in the Trenches" . which is about the Christmas Truce of 1914. I strongly suggest watching and listening to

both YouTube videos (links are noted) to fully appreciate the emotional strength of the two songs. The images that accompany the song are as powerful as the lyrics.

The Band Played Waltzing Matilda

By Eric Brogle

When I was a young man I carried me pack
And I lived the free life of the rover
From the Murray's green basin to the dusty outback
I waltzed my Matilda all over

Then in 1915 my country said: " Son,
It's time to stop rambling, there's work to be done"
So they gave me a tin hat and they gave me a gun
And they sent me away to the war

And the band played Waltzing Matilda
When the ship pulled away from the quay
And amid all the tears, flag waving and cheers
We sailed off for Gallipoli

It well I remember that terrible day
When our blood stained the sand and the water
And how in that hell they call Suvla Bay
We were butchered like lambs at the slaughter

Johnny Turk, he was ready, he primed himself well
He rained us with bullets, and he showered us with shell
And in five minutes flat, we were all blown to hell
He nearly blew us back home to Australia

And the band played Waltzing Matilda
When we stopped to bury our slain
Well we buried ours and the Turks buried theirs
Then it started all over again

Oh those that were living just tried to survive
In that mad world of blood, death and fire
And for ten weary weeks I kept myself alive
While around me the corpses piled higher

Then a big Turkish shell knocked me arse over head
And when I awoke in me hospital bed
And saw what it had done, I wished I was dead
I never knew there was worse things than dying

Oh no more I'll go Waltzing Matilda
All around the green bush far and near
For to hump tent and pegs, a man needs both legs

No more waltzing Matilda for me

They collected the wounded, the crippled, the maimed
And they shipped us back home to Australia
The armless, the legless, the blind and the insane
Those proud wounded heroes of Suvla

And when the ship pulled into Circular Quay
I looked at the place where me legs used to be
And thank Christ there was no one there waiting for me
To grieve and to mourn and to pity

And the Band played Waltzing Matilda
When they carried us down the gangway
Oh nobody cheered, they just stood there and stared
Then they turned all their faces away

Now every April I sit on my porch
And I watch the parade pass before me
I see my old comrades, how proudly they march
Renewing their dreams of past glories

I see the old men all tired, stiff and worn
Those weary old heroes of a forgotten war
And the young people ask: "What are they marching for?"
And I ask myself the same question

And the band plays Waltzing Matilda
And the old men still answer the call
But year after year, their numbers get fewer
Someday, no one will march there at all

Waltzing Matilda, Waltzing Matilda
Who'll come a-Waltzing Matilda with me?
And their ghosts may be heard as they march by the billabong
So who'll come a-Waltzing Matilda with me?

Singer-songwriter John McCutcheon's powerful anti-war song, Christmas in the Trenches, is about the spontaneous, unauthorized (?) Christmas Truce of 1914. The episode was widely censored-out of humanity's consciousness for nearly a hundred years, but it happened all up and down the 600-mile line of trenches.

Lowly, indoctrinated, suffering troops on both sides of No Man's Land were sick and tired of the constant killing, wounding, dying and suffering. So on Christmas Eve of 1914, just a few months into the war, thousands of these suffering Christian soldiers on both sides of No Man's Land overcame their fear of authority and the artificially-implanted kill-or-be-killed warrior mentalities and raised up their deadened Christ-like, humanitarian spirit of love and peace and fraternized with the enemy. And for a day or so, they rejected the unnatural, satanic spirit of war and death.. Many of them refused to shoot their rifles ever again. Some were re-assigned, court-martialed or shipped to other sectors, but their lives were forever

changed.

The movie *Joyeux Noel*, which was nominated for an Academy Award for best foreign film, does a great job in capturing the power of the story.

Of course, the Christmas truce was angrily opposed by the superior officers on both, officers who were nowhere near the front lines on that Christmas Eve.

McCutcheon's song about the episode ends with the eternal truth that indicts the war-makers of every war by pointing out that "the ones who call the shots won't be among the dead and lame, and on each end of the rifle we're the same."

Here are the lyrics of McCutcheon's famous antiwar song:

Christmas in the Trenches

By John McCutcheon

My name is Francis Tolliver, I come from Liverpool.
Two years ago, the war was waiting for me after school.
To Belgium and to Flanders, to Germany to here,
I fought for King and country I love dear.

'Twas Christmas in the trenches where the frost so bitter hung,
the frozen fields of France were still, no Christmas song was sung,
our families back in England were toasting us that day,
their brave and glorious lads so far away.

I was lying with my messmate on the cold and rocky ground,
when across the lines of battle came a most peculiar sound.
Says I «Now listen up, me boys!», each soldier strained to hear
as one young German voice sang out so clear.

"He's singing bloody well, you know!" my partner says to me.
Soon, one by one, each German voice joined in in harmony.
The cannons rested silent, the gas clouds rolled no more
as Christmas brought us respite from the war.

As soon as they were finished and a reverent pause was spent,
"God Rest Ye Merry, Gentlemen", struck up some lads from Kent.
The next they sang was "Stille Nacht", "Tis "Silent Night", says I
and, in two tongues, one song filled up that sky.

"There's someone coming towards us!" the frontline sentry cried,
all sights were fixed on one lone figure coming from their side.
His truce flag, like a Christmas star, shone on that plain so bright
as he bravely strode unarmed into the night.

Then, one by one on either side walked into no man's land,
with neither gun nor bayonet, we met there hand to hand,

we shared some secret brandy and wished each other well,
and in a flare-lit soccer game we gave 'em hell.

We traded chocolates, cigarettes, and photographs from home,
these sons and fathers far away from families of their own.
Young Sanders played his squeeze box and they had a violin,
this curious and unlikely band of men.

Oh, soon daylight stole upon us and France was France once more;
with sad farewells, we each began to settle back to war,
but the question haunted every heart that lived that wondrous night
"Whose family have I fixed within my sights?"

'Twas Christmas in the trenches, where the frost so bitter hung,
the frozen fields of France were warmed as songs of peace were sung.
For the walls they'd kept between us to exact the work of war
had been crumbled and were gone for evermore.

Oh, my name is Francis Tolliver, in Liverpool I dwell,
each Christmas come since World War I I've learned its lessons well,
that the ones who call the shots won't be among the dead and lame,
and on each end of the rifle we're the same.

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