

Festivals, Carnivals and Celebrations and Saucy Sophia's Snippets plus trailer for next month.

April, 2023.

This year, 2023 Good Friday falls on the 7th of April, but in 1916 Good Friday was on the 21st of April and despite the horrors and privations of life in the trenches, Easter was still celebrated.

The 359th Infantry Regiment of the French Army on the Western Front published the first issue of the regiment's self-produced newspaper, *Le Pèpère — Journal Gai du 359^{ème} Régiment d'Infanterie* or the Merry Newspaper of the 359th Infantry Regiment on Good Friday 1916. The front-page featured "Les Oeufs de Pâques" or Easter Eggs with a list of the regiment's officers and next to each name what each should ideally receive in his oeuf, drawing on a French Easter tradition of exchanging confectionary eggs containing surprise gifts. As with some of our army's trench newspapers, such as the Wipers Times, missing letters were replaced with punctuation marks, possibly because there was a shortage of type face.

As you may expect, the celebration of Easter was not confined to the Allies but was also celebrated by the forces of the Central Powers, and the Imperial War Museum in Lambeth has a photograph of German troops celebrating Easter in their dugout in the Champagne sector of the Front on the 8th of April 1917. The phrase *Frohliche Ostern* or Happy Easter can be observed written on a board which may be a makeshift door.



Reichswehr troops celebrating Easter in a dugout on the 8th April, 1917

For those of the Orthodox Church Easter is of greater importance than Christmas and thus of particular significance for the airmen, sailors, and soldiers of Holy Russia. An account exists of the Easter Truce of 1916 on the South-eastern Front in Galicia by Friedrich Kohn a Hungarian regimental medical officer of the army of the Dual Monarchy (Austro-

Hungaria). In his account he records that the winter of 1915-16 had been very severe and when he joined the regiment to whom he had been seconded at the end of February the country was covered in deep snow which curtailed military action until the thaw set in. This form of peace prevented artillery duels between the Austrian and Russian armies but with the thaw they started again, sometimes by day, but more frequently during darkness.

At about 0500 hours (5 o'clock) on Easter Sunday morning about twenty Russians came out of their trenches, waving white flags and unarmed but baskets and bottles. One of the Russian soldiers approached the Hungarian regiment's lines quite close and one of the Hungarians climbed out of the Austro-Hungarian trench and went to meet the Russian and enquired what he wanted. The Russian asked if we would agree to stop the war for a day or two in consideration of Easter and meet between the lines and have a meal together. We told him that first we would have to ask the military authorities whether such a meeting would be possible. The Divisional Commander refused permission. Nevertheless at 12 noon the Russians came out of their trenches and brought with them their military band, who came playing at full strength, and they brought baskets of food and bottles of wine and vodka, and we came out too and had a meal with them. We also had food and wine to offer. It is recorded that during the meeting in no man's land both sides seemed to be embarrassed but were polite to each other and consumed the food and drink on offer. The meeting lasted a few hours after which both sides quietly returned to their trenches.

Friedrich Kohn, the medical officer talked with a Colonel who spoke perfect German which was the result of having lived for several years in Vienna. When Friedrich Kohn enquired why he continually fired shrapnel shells at his field dressing station, or first aid post the Russian Colonel responded by stating that he knew exactly where it is and promised to leave the first aid post alone and that he would send a rocket if and when he was transferred to a different sector of the front. For the next fourteen days the field dressing station remained unmolested, then he sent a rocket to announce his departure.

Friedrich Kohn was fortunate to survive the ensuing Brusilov offensive of June 1916, when the brilliant Russian General Aleksei Brusilov launched a carefully planned attack against the Central Powers on the south-eastern front.



General Aleksei Brusilov

The Russian offensive, launched on the 4th June, 1916, involved a major action against the armies of the Central Powers in Galicia, now known as north western Ukraine, in the region of Lviv and Volyn Oblasts, and continued until late September. The largest and most lethal offensive of the war, the effects of the offensive were far-reaching. It relieved German pressure on French forces at Verdun and helped to relieve the Austro-Hungarian pressure on the Italians. It inflicted irreparable losses on Austro-Hungarian forces, and induced Romania to enter the war on the side of the Entente. The human and material losses on the Russian side also greatly contributed to the onset of the Russian Revolution the following year.

The major tactical innovation of the offensive was in pushing the Russian trenches forward close to those of the Central Powers, so close that some Russian soldiers could overhear Austrian or German conversation on a quiet night. Once the artillery barrage lifted the Russian troops were into the enemy trenches before the occupants realised and in their somewhat disoriented state offered little resistance. As already mentioned, the action proved expensive in manpower for all concerned, too expensive.



The Eastern Front in 1916.

Saucy Sophia's Snippets



Another post card by the famous Charles Dana Gibson from the Matrimonial Misfits series.

12.30 A.M. The Husband wants to go home and the Wife who doesn't.

A postcard in the Author's private collection.

Trailer for next month.

On the 1st of May, 1862 the International Exhibition or the Great London Exhibition opened at South Kensington on a site now occupied by the Natural History Museum.

Dorian Osborne

1st April, 2023.