

# Another Christmas Story

"Hey Johnny!" the blue clad soldier shouted across the river to the man in gray. Merry Christmas!"

"Whats that ye said thar Yank?" the man in gray said loudly, gruffly as he instinctively turned his rifle in the direction of the voice.

"Aww, put down that gun ya dern fool!", called the Yank as he stepped from behind large rocks, his own rifle shouldered, nonthreatening. "I said, Merry Christmas! It's Christmas Day, don't ya know."

The Reb relaxed, grounded the butt of his rifle, and scratched his chin. "I reckon I know what day it is. What of it?" the Reb spat a mighty stream of tobacco after the words.

The Yank studied the Reb for a minute or two, the Reb slowly worked his quid, and glowered at the Yank. He could not understand how this man in blue could be so friendly, so cheerful, standing picket out here in the cold, and only weeks after one of the hardest fights the Reb had ever been in. He had seen a lot of fighting and dieing since the Spring of '61. He had joined the Army of Virginia even before Virginia had cast its lot with the Confederacy. He scratched his chin again, puzzling over this blue clad stranger.

"I got nothin' to trade with Yank. 'Sides, my mess mates are tradin' with some of your fellers down the river a piece." The Reb decided that was why the Yankee was being so friendly. He had heard they would trade for just about anything, but most times it was to their advantage.

"That's all right, Reb. I ain't lookin' to trade. I just wanted to talk a spell. It beats slingin' bullets at each other don't it? And after all, it's Chri..."

"I know what day it is! But what has that got to do with all of this? It doesn't matter to them that lay up thar 'neath that stone wall, or behind it. Just because it is Christmas will those fellers be celebratin'? No! And it durn sure don't mean we'uns ain't goin' to be killin' each other come sundown, or tomorrow, or the next day. And it sure ain't keepin' me warm!" The Reb pulled his coat closer to his neck and blew on his hands. He had never been so cold so far as he could recall. "Blamed fool." he

muttered. "How long you been in Mister Lincolns army anyway?" the Reb asked bitterly.

The Yank smiled. A quiet face, slightly cherubic, a look that never changed. No stain of anger, or arrogance rested there. It was peaceful yet resolute, and the smile it bore was sincere. "I been in since August this year, but we didn't join the brigade until October. What regiment are you with Reb?"

The man in gray leaned on his rifle, scowled, and sent another stream of tobacco juice into the river. "Blamed fool." he muttered. Shouting now he said, " Yank, I don't believe I need to be tellin' you thet!" The Reb was certain now the Yankee was a scout, putting up a dodge to get information. The question was innocent enough, but the Reb still was wary. "All I can tell you is I fight with General Lee! But I reckon you already know that, and that's all you need know."

The Yank chuckled. "All right then. Just trying to be friendly. It being Christmas and all. How many messmates do you have?"

At this the Reb quickly hoisted his rifle to his shoulder and took steady aim on the man in blue.

"Now look here, you no good scoundrel! I've had a belly full of your questions and about all I can mortally stand of you and the rest of you black hatted fellers! If you don't move on down the bank I'm of a mind to plug you, Christmas or no! Now git!" He cocked his rifle to emphasize the point.

The Yank, still smiling, said calmly, " Alright Reb. No offense intended. I will be on my way. Merry Christmas, Reb." He then strolled down the river bank, whistling merrily, and disappeared.

The man in gray spat. "Peculiar feller that one." He lowered his rifle and began to trudge down the river. Thirty yards this way, thirty yards that way. He would pause occasionally to listen for sound coming from the far bank. He heard nothing in the chill air save for someone singing "Silent Night" somewhere in the distance. He could not tell from which bank it came from or if it was just hanging in the air indifferent to the men that heard it. It sounded as if it came from nowhere and at the same time from

everywhere at once. "As if the very angels of heaven are singing." the Reb muttered as he shivered. "Cold. I never been this cold." He cursed; the army, the cold, Jeff Davis, and that blue clad soldier.

He thought about the Yank. "That feller sure was peculiar. Never quit smiling even when I had him in my sites. Nary a flinch either. Merry Christmas he says. Thunderation it's cold! Christmas again and me nowhere near home. I want to go home! I'm sick of the cold, I'm sick of death. I want to go home! But I can't rightly see how I can go." The Reb shivered again and wiped tears from his eyes. "Blamed fool. Christmas! Bah!"

A clear, cheerful voice called across the river. "Hey Reb! Catch!" It was the same Yank, wearing the same smile on his face as before. He was kneeling at the waters edge, holding a small, sturdy boat filled with goods.

"Now hold on there , Yank! I told you to git! Whats this?" the Reb questioned angrily. " I told you I got nothin' to trade!"

"I didn't ask you to trade, Reb!" the Yank shouted as he launched his boat. "You can keep the boat if you want. I won't need it again."

The Reb scratched his chin and glared at the Yank. "Obliged to ye Yank. But why?" he said coolly. "Tomorrow will be the same as yesterday or the thirteenth. You remember the thirteenth, don't you Yank?" The Reb expected to anger the blue soldier with this last question, delivered maliciously, but it drew no response. The Reb was perplexed. Any soldier would have answered angrily at this intended insult, but not this man. The Reb spat.

"I remember it well, Reb." the Yank said gently " You boys sure gave us a time that day. I will never see another day like it."

The boat was at the Rebs feet in seconds as if it were guided by unseen hands. It contained five pounds of good coffee, a good wool blanket a handful of buttons. "Hurumph! Federal buttons!" the Reb growled. Then he smiled as he looked at the empty places on his coat where those Federal buttons would help close it against the winter chill.

" I thought you could use those." called the Yank.

"Mighty kind, Yank. But you still ain't told me why you are doin' this." said the Reb, his words softening a bit. "You are a perplexing feller. I can't see

rightly how you can be so all-fired friendly in the middle of a war, especially after..." The Reb stopped abruptly at this, his mind returning to the scenes of that day, a scant two weeks before. He had not been in that fight, there at the wall, but he had had plenty of fighting on his end of the line, and had seen plenty of the Yankee boys fall. Rebs too. The following day he was detailed to carry a message to the left, and he had to travel near the spot. The scene he beheld was so frightful that he was sickened by it. The men in blue lay so thick in front that the ground appeared, in places, to be a solid mass of blue, and in other places the rows of dead looked like stalks of corn laid low by a scythe. He felt a chill sweep over him, and he had not been warm since. Tears flooded his eyes, and he could not speak. The Yank was watching him intently, still smiling. He uttered not a word in reply but nodded his head slightly, knowingly.

"You don't suppose they will make us fight today, do you Yank?" the Reb asked with trembling voice.

"Today? Naww. I don't believe they will make us fight today." the Yank said. "Tomorrow, next day, maybe. Not today.

For unto you is born this day, in the City of David  
a Savior, which is Christ the Lord.

And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude  
of the heavenly host praising God, and saying,  
Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace,  
good will toward men. [1]

There will be no killing and dieing today, Reb."

"That is if the generals go along with what the Good Book says. Sometimes I wonder about 'em." grumbled the Reb.

"I think they will heed the scripture today of all days." the Yank said cheerily. "I suppose I should be getting back to camp. Again, Merry Christmas Johnny!"

"Merry Christmas Billy Yank. Lets both hope for a blessed new year!" said the Reb as he turned to renew his lonely tramp along the river. Thirty yards this way, thirty yards that way. He could not help thinking about the Yank. He still could not understand how anyone, of either army, could be

so pleasant and cheerful in this cold, in this war and so far from home, but that smile the blue clad soldier bore haunted him. It was always there, never a trace of bitterness removing or even diminishing it. Peculiar. Suddenly he heard voices singing "Angels! We Have heard on High!", many voices. Then it struck him. The face of the Yank could have been that of an angel! He laughed at himself, then shivered. He turned to the opposite bank and laughing, called out, "Hey Yank! Do you believe in angels? Yank?"

There was no reply.