



The Western Dispatch

Holiday Issue



The Official Newsletter of the 6th Military District SVR

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Merry Christmas to the Brothers of the 6th Military District SVR



**Brother Bob Lowe Directs the SVR at
the Mother Goose Christmas Parade**

Christmas North and South

The Smithsonian Associates Civil War E-Mail Newsletter, Volume 4, Number 7 It hasn't escaped the attention of many that the traditions associated with Christmas celebrations in the United States today began during the Civil War. Without a doubt, it was the loneliness and insecurities of war felt by citizens and soldiers alike that created a need for them to seek solace and security. They found it in part by re-establishing familiar European traditions. This created the illusion of love and peace at a time when very little of that existed in their daily lives. Christmas had been celebrated in Europe with eating, drinking, and dancing. It was the Puritans who attempted to end this indulgent behavior, and did it successfully when they came to America. With their arrival, Christmas became a serious occasion, the purpose of which was to introspectively ponder sin and religious commitment. It took almost 200 years for our country to move away from this Puritan view and enjoy the holidays once more. Louisiana was the first state to make Christmas a holiday in 1830, and many states soon followed. Congress did not make Christmas a federal holiday until 1870. The religious revival of the mid 19th century also added to the desire to unite, celebrate, and recognize Christmas. Christmas cards, carols, special foods, holding winter dances, all date back to the late 1850s. Even before the Civil War, it was common to cut Christmas trees and take them into the home, although they were tabletop size, and usually were arranged with other greenery and mistletoe, all supposed to bring good luck to the household. Union soldiers' letters mention decorating their camp Christmas trees with salt-pork and hard tack. It was the development of the modern Santa Claus that embedded Christmas into the American way of life. In 1861, Thomas Nast was a German immigrant working as a writer and artist at *Harper's Weekly*. When he was tasked with providing a drawing to accompany Clement Clark Moore's 1821 poem, *'Twas the Night Before Christmas*, he called upon his Bavarian childhood to create our modern image of Santa Claus. His cherubic (but thin by today's standards) Santa was depicted bringing gifts of *Harper's* to the soldiers, making Nast the first to combine imagery (Santa Claus) and commercialism (selling *Harper's*) into the American marketplace. Santa brought children gifts, and gifts were always home made. Children were satisfied to receive just small hand-carved toys, cakes, oranges or apples. Many Southern diaries tell the story of Santa running the blockaded ports in Dixie to fill children's stockings with what little the parents could spare to make the day special for them. Even General Sherman's soldiers played Santa to impoverished Southern children by attaching tree-branch antlers to their horses and bringing food to the starving families in the war-ravaged Georgia countryside. The most famous Christmas gift of the war was sent by telegram from William Tecumseh Sherman to Abraham Lincoln on December 22, 1864. "I beg to present you as a Christmas gift, the city of Savannah, with 100 and 50 guns and plenty of ammunition, also about 25,000 bales of cotton." The gift, of course, wasn't the guns, the ammunition or the cotton, but the beginning of the end of the Civil War.

"Ought it not be a Merry Christmas?"



Lonely camp scene from an 1862 *Harper's Weekly* entitled "Christmas Eve".

"Ought it not be a Merry Christmas?"

Even with all the sorrow that hangs, and will forever hang, over so many households; even while war still rages; even while there are serious questions yet to be settled - ought it not to be, and is it not, a merry Christmas?"

Harper's Weekly, December 26, 1863

Information for this article was drawn from "*We Were Marching on Christmas Day: A History and Chronicle of Christmas During the Civil War*" by Kevin Rawlings.

Introduction



Harper's Weekly depicts a family separated by war in its January 3, 1863 edition.

For a nation torn by civil war, Christmas in the 1860s was observed with conflicting emotions. Nineteenth-century Americans embraced Christmas with all the Victorian trappings that had moved the holiday from the private and religious realm to a public celebration. Christmas cards were in vogue, carol singing was common in public venues, and greenery festooned communities north and south. Christmas trees stood in places of honor in many homes, and a mirthful poem about the jolly old elf who delivered toys to well-behaved children captivated Americans on both sides of the Mason-Dixon line.

But Christmas also made the heartache for lost loved ones more acute. As the Civil War dragged on, deprivation replaced bounteous repasts and familiar faces were missing from the family dinner table. Soldiers used to "bringing in the tree" and caroling in church were instead scavenging for firewood and singing drinking songs around the campfire. And so the holiday celebration most associated with family and home was a contradiction. It was a joyful, sad, religious, boisterous, and subdued event.

Before the war



"The Christmas Tree" by F. A. Chapman.

Many of the holiday customs we associate with Christmas today were familiar to 1840s celebrants. Christmas cards were popularized that decade and Christmas trees were a stylish addition to the parlor. By the 1850s, Americans were singing "It Came Upon a Midnight Clear" and "Away in a Manger" in public settings. In 1850 and 1860, *Godey's Lady's Book* featured Queen Victoria's tabletop Christmas tree, placed there by her German husband Prince Albert. Closer to home, in December, 1853, Robert E. Lee's daughter recorded in her diary that her father - then superintendent at West Point - possessed an evergreen tree decorated with dried and sugared fruit, popcorn, ribbon, spun glass ornaments, and silver foil.

Clement Clarke Moore, a religious scholar who for decades was too embarrassed to claim authorship of the 1822 poem, "A Visit From St. Nicholas," was now well-known for his tribute to Santa Claus. "Santa Claus" made his first public appearance in a Philadelphia department store in 1849, marking the advent of holiday commercialism.

For enslaved African Americans, the Christmas season often meant a mighty bustle of cooking, housekeeping, and other chores. "Reward" for these efforts was a suspension of duties for a day or two and the opportunity for singing, dancing, and possible brief reunions with separated family members. By 1860, many worried about civil unrest, fearful this Christmas would be the last before the outbreak of war. An Arkansas diarist writes:

"Christmas has come around in the circle of time, but is not a day of rejoicing. Some of the usual ceremonies are going on, but there is gloom on the thoughts and countenances of all the better portion of our people."

1861



Men of the 5th New Hampshire engaged in a hilarious greased pig chase as their Christmas entertainment. *From Frank Leslie's Illustrated History of the Civil War.*

Events proceeded quickly in 1861, hastening war. Abraham Lincoln became the 16th president of the United States in March and the bombardment of Fort Sumter occurred in April. Southern states seceded and the Confederates claimed their first major victory at "First Bull Run." For the shopkeeper or farm boy or student away from home for Christmas the first time, melancholy set in.

Robert Gould Shaw, then a 2nd lieutenant in the 2d Massachusetts Infantry, writes about guard duty near Frederick, MD. He would later earn fame as the commander of the heroic African American unit, the 54th Massachusetts.

"It is Christmas morning and I hope a happy and merry one for you all, though it looks so stormy for our poor country, one can hardly be in merry humor."

James Holloway, writing from Dranesville, VA tells his family that Christmas:

"You have no idea how lonesome I feel this day. It's the first time in my life I'm away from loved ones at home."

On the civilian front, Sallie Brock Putnam describes Christmas, 1861 in Richmond, VA.

"Never before had so sad a Christmas dawned upon us. Our religious services were not remitted and the Christmas dinner was plenteous of old; but in nothing did it remind us of days gone by. We had neither the heart nor inclination to make the week merry with joyousness when such a sad calamity hovered over us."

Yet Christmas 1861 also saw soldiers full of bravado, still relatively well fed and equipped, and eagerly anticipating Christmas boxes of treats from home. Often officers authorized extra rations of spirits and men engaged in greased pig-catching contests, footraces, jumping matches, and impromptu pageants dressed as women. Soldiers erected small evergreen trees strung withhardtack and pork. Some were excused from drills, although other references point to the need to haul logs and forage for firewood no matter what day of the year it was.



Artist Winslow Homer depicts soldiers' joy at receiving holiday boxes from home in this 1861 *Harper's Weekly* illustration.

1862



By Christmas, 1862, Thomas Nast had allied Santa Claus with the Union Army. From *Harper's Weekly*, January 3, 1863.

This sad year brought forth the war's impact full force with battles at Shiloh, Manassas, and Antietam, and campaigns in the Shenandoah Valley and the Peninsula. Many Fredericksburg, Virginia citizens were homeless or fled their town just prior to Christmas.

Harper's Weekly illustrator Thomas Nast, a staunch Unionist, is now depicting Santa Claus entertaining Federal soldiers by showing them Jefferson Davis with a cord around his neck. Abraham Lincoln would later refer to a politicized Santa as "the best recruiting sergeant the North ever had." More moderate illustrations show soldiers decorating camps with greens and firing salutes to Santa. Ironically, it was Nast who fixed Santa's home and toy workshop address at the "North Pole" "so no nation can claim him as their own."

Officers of the 20th Tennessee gave their men a barrel of whisky to mark the day. "We had many a drunken fight and knock-down before the day closed," wrote one participant. But there were other more somber occurrences recorded for Christmas 1862. One account tells of soldiers being forced to witness an execution for desertion and another grim letter describes how men firing their weapons in a funeral salute were mistakenly punished for unauthorized holiday merrymaking.

1863



Children still found Christmas morning joyful in this 1864 *Harper's Weekly* edition. Note that the youngster on the right is equipped with sword, drum, kepi and a haversack with "U.S." prominently displayed.

This year saw the battles of Gettysburg and Vicksburg and the beginning of the end for the Confederacy. Thomas Nast portrayed Santa Claus in a patriotic uniform, distributing to Yankee soldiers to raise their morale. Southern parents were gently preparing their children that Santa Claus may not "make it through the blockade" to deliver presents this year. *Harper's Weekly* depicted a tender reunion scene of a soldier husband and father briefly reunited with his family during furlough.

Holiday boxes and barrels from home containing food, clothing and small articles of comfort were highly anticipated by soldier recipients. Depending on their duty assignment, Christmas dinner may have consisted of only crackers, hard tack, rice, beans and a casting of lots for a single piece of beef too small to divide. Those lucky enough to receive boxes from home could supplement a meager meal with turkey, oysters, potatoes, ham, cabbage, eggnog, cranberries and fruitcake.

One of the dreariest accounts of Christmas during the Civil War came from Lt. Col. Frederic Cavada, captured at Gettysburg and writing about Christmas 1863 in Libby Prison in Richmond:

"The north wind comes reeling in fitful gushes through the iron bars, and jingles a sleigh bell in the prisoner's ear, and puffs in his pale face with a breath suggestively odorous of eggnog."

Cavada continued:

"Christmas Day! A day which was made for smiles, not sighs - for laughter, not tears - for the hearth, not prison."

He described a makeshift dinner set on a tea towel-covered box. Each prisoner brought his own knife and fork and drank "Eau de James" (water from the nearby James River.) Cavada reported he combed his hair for the occasion and further related that the prisoners staged a "ball" with a "great deal of bad dancing" during which hats were crushed and trousers torn. Sentries called "lights out" at 9 p.m.



General William Tecumseh Sherman is host at a celebratory Christmas dinner in Savannah after presenting the captured city to President Lincoln as a holiday.

1864

The final wartime Christmas came as the Confederacy floundered, Lee's Army behind entrenchments in Petersburg and Richmond. Abraham Lincoln received a most unusual holiday gift - the city of Savannah, GA - presented by General William Tecumseh Sherman via telegram. Union and Confederate sympathizers were hoping this Christmas would be the last at conflict.

Johnny Green, of the 4th Kentucky's Orphan Brigade, expressed this sentiment:

"Peace on Earth, Good will to men should prevail. We certainly would preserve the peace if they would go home and let us alone..."

Green further reports he and his comrades received an unexpected and very welcome holiday:

"Our commissary sends word for each Orderly Sergeant to come to his wagon & he will issue one piece of soap to each man. This is indeed good news. Since the Skirmish began at Stockbridge Nov 15 we have not had a chance to wash any more than our faces occasionally & never our feet or bodies until now...."

Holiday season charity was not forgotten this year. On Christmas Day, 90 Michigan men and their captain loaded up wagons with food and supplies and distributed them to destitute civilians in the Georgia countryside. The Union "Santa Clauses" tied tree branches to the heads of the mule teams to resemble reindeer.

Many other units, however, were on the march, either trying to evade capture or pursuing the opponent for better position. Soldiers left in the squalid conditions of prison camps spent the day remembering holidays at home, as did others in slightly more comfortable settings. Confederate General Gordon, writing from his headquarters near Petersburg, wrote of fighting famine as well as General Grant:

"The one worn-out railroad running to the far South could not bring us half enough necessary supplies: and even if it could have transported Christmas boxes of good things, the people at home were too depleted to send them."

His wife, who was with him at headquarters, presented him with a most precious treat for Christmas 1864 - "real" coffee brought from home 'to celebrate our victories in the first years and to sustain us in defeat at the last.'

Moods were more buoyant in Washington and New York, where celebrants supped on substantial feasts and attended the theatre.



"Snowy Morning on Picket" from *Harper's Weekly* January 30, 1864.

After the war

Thomas Nast's most famous image of Santa Claus was published in *Harper's Weekly* on January 1, 1881.



The events of 1865 again influenced holiday celebrations. President Lincoln's assassination shocked the nation, but by mid-summer, the conspirators were hung or imprisoned for lengthy terms. War was ended and many soldiers had been mustered out of service. The 13th Amendment to the Constitution became law on December 18, 1865, abolishing the institution of slavery. Soldiers and civilians alike were ready to reunite with their families and again embrace Victorian holiday customs.

At the end of hostilities, commerce once again flowed southward, and goods filled Northern shops. Long-held holiday traditions were re-introduced, as ornamental greens and trees filled the markets and toys and other items went on display. Newspaper illustrations were of domestic and wintry scenes.

The final verse of a poem *By the Christmas Hearth* published in the Christmas edition of *Harper's Weekly* reflected the sentiments of many:

*Bring holly, rich with berries red,
And bring the sacred mistletoe;
Fill high each glass, and let hearts
With kindest feelings flow;
So sweet it seems at home once more
To sit with those we hold most dear,
And keep absence once again
To keep the Merry Christmas here.*

Civil War "Night Before Christmas,"

or,

A Visit From St. Sutler

by Celia Mater

'Twas the night before Christmas, and all through the camp
The rations were scarce, and the firewood was damp.
Wet stockings were hung by the firesides with care
In hopes that by day they'd be dry enough to wear.

The soldiers were nestled all snug in their tents
While visions of Christmas feasts danced through their heads.
The General in his wall tent, and I with nightcap
Had just settled ourselves for a long winter's nap.

When out on the picket line there arose such a clatter,
I sprang from my cot to see what was the matter.
Away to the provost I flew like a flash,
Grabbed pistol and leathers and officer's sash.

When what to my wondering eyes did appear
But a miniature wagon and eight Army mules.--Queer!--
And a little old driver so lively and quick.
By the way that he cussed he sure wasn't St. Nick.

More rapid than eagles his Army mules came,
And he whistled and shouted and called them by name:

*"Now, Sherman, now Burnside, now Pope and McClelland,
On, Rosecrans! On, Sheridan! On, Grant and McClellan!
To the top of the A-frames and the top of the tent wall,
Dash away, dash away, dash away all!"*

As Rebs that before the wild Yank onslaught fly,
When they meet with an obstacle, manage to shy,
So through company streets the "coursers" they flew
With a wagon of goodies--and the old sutler too.

And then, in a twinkling, I heard vocal jewels:
The musical hee-haws of eight Army mules.
As I drew in my head and was turning around,
Into the tent the man came with a bound.

He was dressed all in wool from his head to his foot,
And his clothes were all tarnished with mud and with soot.
A bundle of canned goods he'd flung on his back,
And he looked like a sutler just opening his pack.
(That's what he was, of course.)

His eyes--how they twinkled! His whiskers, how merry!
His cheeks were like roses, his nose like a cherry!
His droll little mouth was drawn up like a bow
And the beard on his chin was a white as the snow.

The stump of a stogie he held in his teeth,
And the smoke it encircled his head like a wreath.
He had a broad face and a little round belly.
He'd brought vittles for us--fresh pies, cakes, and jelly.

He was chubby and plump--no diet of hardtack.
And I was quite interested in the food in his backpack.
A wink of his eye and a twist of his head
Soon gave me to know he had brought some *soft* bread.

He spoke not a word, but unloaded his treasures:
Roast turkeys and hams and *bottles* in full measures.
Then laying a finger aside of his nose,
And giving a salute, to his feet he then rose.

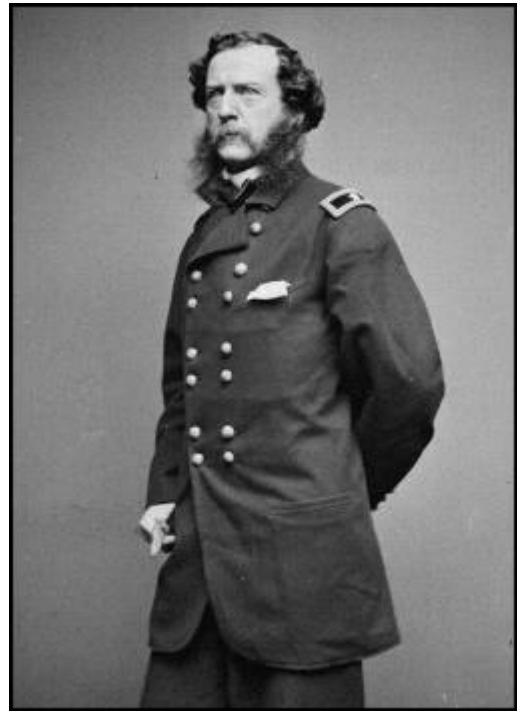
He sprang to his wain, to his team gave a whistle,
And away they all flew like the down of a thistle.
And I heard him exclaim as he drove out of sight:
"Happy Christmas to all, and to all a good night!"

Sent in by Captain Bob Lowe,

Thanks Brother Bob

LAST ISSUE TRIVIA

**Can you put a Name to
this statue of this
General at
Gettysburg???**
**Send your Answer to
Major Dave Allyn**



**The statue at Gettysburg is:
Brig. Gen. Samuel Crawford**



Samuel W. Crawford

From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia

Samuel Wylie Crawford (November 8, 1829 – November 3, 1892) was a U.S. Army surgeon and a Union general in the American Civil War.

Contents

Early life

Crawford was born in Franklin County, Pennsylvania. He graduated from the University of Pennsylvania in 1846 and the University of Pennsylvania medical school in 1850. He joined the U.S. Army as an assistant surgeon in 1851 and served in that capacity for ten years.

Civil War

Crawford was the surgeon on duty at Fort Sumter, South Carolina, during the Confederate bombardment in 1861, which represented the start of the Civil War. Despite his purely medical background, he was in command of several of the artillery pieces returning fire from the fort.

A month after Fort Sumter, Crawford decided on a fundamental career change and accepted a commission as a major in the 13th U.S. Infantry. He served as Assistant Inspector General of the Department of the Ohio starting in September 1861. He was promoted to brigadier general of volunteers on April 25, 1862, and led a brigade in the Department of the Shenandoah, participating in the Valley Campaign against Stonewall Jackson, but the brigade saw no actual combat. Its first taste of battle was during the Northern Virginia Campaign, when it was assigned to the Army of Virginia under John Pope. At the Battle of Cedar Mountain, Crawford's brigade launched a surprise attack upon the Confederate left, routing a division that included the Stonewall Brigade. The Confederates counterattacked, however, and Crawford's brigade, which was unsupported by other units, was driven back with 50% casualties.

At the Battle of Antietam, Crawford temporarily commanded his division when Maj. Gen Alpheus S. Williams was elevated to command the XII Corps. Crawford's temporary command was short, however, when he was wounded in the right thigh. He stayed on the field until he became weak from loss of blood and had to be carried off. The wound took eight months to heal properly and he was unable to return to the field until May of 1863, when he was given command of the Pennsylvania Reserves Division in the defenses of Washington, D.C. In commanding this division, Crawford was following in the footsteps of two Union Army luminaries: John F. Reynolds and George G. Meade.

In June 1863, the Pennsylvania Reserves Division was added to the Army of the Potomac for the Gettysburg Campaign. Crawford was in a difficult situation. His training was as a surgeon, not an infantry division commander, and although he had experience at the brigade level, his eight-month recuperation meant that his skills were at minimal levels at the start of a critical campaign. Furthermore, the troops of his division had just spent six months on easy garrison duty around Washington and were not fully combat ready. On July 2, 1863, Crawford and his division arrived at Gettysburg in the rear of the V Corps, led by Maj. Gen. George Sykes. He was ordered to the front to assist the brigade of Col. Strong Vincent on Little Round Top, but the battle had already petered out by the time his division arrived.

Meanwhile, the Confederate troops of James Longstreet's Corps had swept through the Devil's Den, driving the Union defenders back to Plum Run, a stream just to the west of Little Round Top, and an area that became known to the soldiers as "the Valley of Death". Crawford's division swept down the slope of Little Round Top along with the brigades of Colonels William McCandless and David J. Nevin. McCandless's brigade led the charge, but Crawford apparently desired some of the glory and seized his own division's colors from a surprised sergeant to lead them in the charge, too. The charge was successful, meeting little resistance, and the Confederates were driven from the Valley of Death.

Although this was a relatively minor engagement and casualties were light, Crawford spent the remainder of his life basking in the glory of Little Round Top. After the war, Crawford was prominent in preserving the Gettysburg Battlefield and at one point attempted to raise money to cover the hill with a large memorial building and museum dedicated to his division. (Fortunately, this plan was a failure and Little Round Top remains close to its original condition, although sprinkled with smaller monuments. It survived both an amusement park and a trolley car line, both long gone.) Crawford also spent considerable effort politicking to get the official records of the war to acknowledge his role as the savior of Little Round Top, but he was also unsuccessful in this quest.

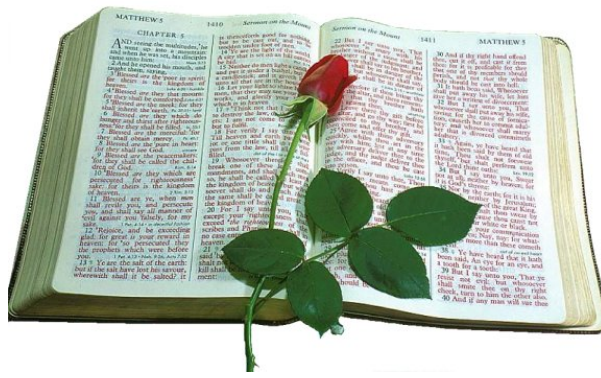
Crawford remained in command of the Pennsylvania Reserve Division in the V Corps for most of the rest of the war, fighting in the Overland Campaign and the Richmond-Petersburg Campaign. He received a brevet promotion to major general on August 1, 1864. On August 18, he was wounded at the chest in the action at the Weldon Railroad. He received a brevet promotion to brigadier general in the Regular Army for the Battle of Five Forks and to major general on March 13, 1865.

Postbellum

Crawford retired from the army on February 19, 1873, and was given the rank of brigadier general, U.S. Army Retired. He died in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, and is buried there in Laurel Hill Cemetery. He was the author of *The Genesis of the Civil War*, published in 1887.

Trivia

Crawford and Truman Seymour were the only two officers to attain the rank of general and witness both Fort Sumter and Appomattox.



Greetings Brothers of the 6th Military District SVR-SUVCW

How time gets away. Here it is Christmas time again. A time to celebrate the birth of Jesus and to reflect on what has happened to us this past year. I had some good times and bad but no matter the circumstances God was watching over me. I would like to pass on a little something I received from a friend. It is worth reflecting on. This is God. Today I will be handling All of your problems for you. I do Not need your help. So, have a nice day.

I love you.

P. S. And, remember...

If life happens to deliver a situation to you that you can't handle, Do Not attempt to resolves it yourself!! Kindly put it in the SFGTD (something for God to do) box. I will get to it in MY TIME. All situations will be resolved, but in MY time, not yours.

Once the matter is placed into the box, do not hold onto it by worrying about it. Instead, focus on all the wonderful things that are present in your life now.

If you find yourself stuck in traffic, don't despair. There are people in this world for whom driving is an unheard of privilege.

Should you have a bad day at work; Think of the man who has been out of work for years. Should you despair over a relation ship gone bad; Think of the person who has never known what it's like to love and be loved in return.

Should you grieve the passing of another weekend; Think of the woman in dire straits, working twelve hours a day, seven days a week to feed her children.

Should your car break down, leaving you miles away from help; Think of the paraplegic who would love the opportunity to take that walk.

Should you notice a new gray hair in the mirror; Think of the cancer patient in chemo who wishes she had hair to examine.

Should you find yourself at a loss and pondering what is life all about, asking what is my purpose? Be thankful. There are those who didn't live long enough to get the opportunity.

Should you find yourself the victim of other people's bitterness, ignorance, smallness of insecurities; Remember, things could be worse. You could be one of them.

Now you have a nice Christmas, God

Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year to All.

Lt. Carl Taylor, Chaplain

6th Military District SVR-SUVCW

