

Excerpt from *The Last and Greatest Battle: Finding the Will, Commitment, and Strategy to End Military Suicides* by John Bateson

At the conclusion of World War II, U.S. Army Brigadier General S. L. A. Marshall interviewed thousands of soldiers and learned a surprising fact: Only 15 to 20 percent fired their weapons in combat. Even when they had the chance, most soldiers didn't fire, or if they did fire they deliberately aimed high or to the side.

"The average and normal healthy individual," Marshall determined, "has such an inner and usually unrealized resistance toward killing a fellow man that he will not of his own volition take life if it is possible to turn away from that responsibility. . . . At the vital point, he becomes a conscientious objector."⁵⁵

This reluctance to shoot a fellow human being was even more surprising since the Japanese, in particular, were demonized by military brass and U.S. propaganda as being a lower form of life, on the order of animals rather than people (this thinking, in part, contributed to the mass interment of Japanese American civilians during the war). Even though soldiers knew that enemy bullets were responsible for the deaths of their comrades, 80 to 85 percent of U.S. troops resisted pulling the trigger.

Bateson, John, *The Last and Greatest Battle: Finding the Will, Commitment, and Strategy to End Military Suicides*, (Oxford University Press, 2015), 87.

Question: Explain why do you think soldiers resisted “pulling the trigger” during the various battles they took part in? What does the *Christmas Truce* tell us about human nature?

Some things to consider in your piece:

- The way in which the soldiers interacted with each other in 1917.
- The article/podcast *Voices of the First World War: The Christmas Truce*
- The text on the front of this handout.
- Make sure your response is minimum 250 words in length.

Structure your response like this:

1. Your first sentence or two outlines your opinion (What you think made soldiers resist “pulling the trigger” during the various battles they took part in).

2. The body of your piece (the next 4-5 examples explain why you think soldiers were hesitant to shoot at each other, highlighting examples from the article/podcast *Voices of the First World War: The Christmas Truce, 1917* and the text on the front of this handout.

3. Your last sentence should wrap up your thoughts about this topic.

