

Trenches and Bunkers (December 22, 1916)

Abstract

It is hardly surprising that trenches – the most powerful symbol of the long, miserable war of attrition – appear in many photographs of the front. Photographs by official war reporters often depict staged situations: soldiers in the trenches hold their guns in firing position, observe the enemy through spyglasses, smile as they read letters or drink coffee. These images turned the trench into part of everyday life, rendered it harmless, and thereby made it comprehensible for those at home. In contrast, the photograph below, taken by an amateur soldier-photographer, keeps its distance. The few soldiers who do appear are so tiny as to be barely noticeable. Instead, the photograph is dominated by the elaborate system of trenches and the makeshift bunkers carved into man-made mounds of earth. Trench warfare appears as a larger phenomenon in which the individual soldier plays only a minute part.

The postcard reads as follows:

22. December [19]16 (Postmark December 23, 1916)

Dear Nurse Christine!

Thank you very much for your friendly Christmas package. It has now been almost two years since I came to you at the field station. Wishing you a merry Christmas.

Warm greetings, your Schabel

Source



Source: Photographs and postcards are courtesy of the Mauch and Roller families, Weil im Schönbuch, Germany.

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