



## What's in this issue

**Y**ou'll find that this month there is a Christmas theme to the newsletter for some reason. It probably has something to do with the fact that it's Christmas I guess.

On page two there is an article the first Christmas of World War I. I know I ran the story last year, but it's a story that needs to be read again, and again.

Page eight has an article about applying for the job of Santa. Do you have what it takes?

Page 10 has a few stories about food in the SADF, and especially Christmas time.

Page 14 contains an article by my good friend and colleague Ryan Murphy. He never served in the military but was a conflict journalist for 30 years. He's probably seen more action than most and has been wounded five times.

Finally, as usual, we have By the left, quick laugh.

Trust you will enjoy it.



**S**o, that's another year done and dusted. And this is the second Christmas edition of the Halifax Herald. Where has the time gone?

I hope that in 2017 we're going to recruit plenty of new members not only to the Moth Order, but to our shellhole. Hey, we'd better get on with it because each year there's less and less people that qualify to become a member.

How many of you spent a Christmas on the border? I spent three of them there and while I wouldn't call it fun, it was different. In some ways you could even call it enjoyable.

I trust that in 2017 more members of the shellhole are going to start contributing a few articles to our newsletter. Or I may just have to start assigning people stuff to do. Come on, you've all got at least one good story to tell.

In closing off the year may I take this opportunity to wish you all a very happy and peaceful Christmas. And may 2017 be prosperous and may you be blessed with good health.

I will see you all at the Border Boys Parade in February. You will be there, naturally.

YUTTH, Matt Tennyson

# Silent Night

**The First World War had been raging for nine months and countless lives had already been lost. Yet on 24 December 1914 the guns along the Western Front fell silent. It was the first Christmas of the war and the opposing soldiers were determined to celebrate the fact.**

**I**t was called the 'Great War' or 'The War to end all Wars'. It had begun in April 1914 and by the time it ended in November 1918 more than 10 million lives would be lost. Yet in 1939, a mere 21 years later, the world was at war once again. This new conflict would become known as World War II and the 'Great War' of 1914-18 would be renamed World War I.

By December 1914 the war had become static. An elaborate trench system had been constructed by both the Germans and the Allies. In some places troops faced each other with less than 100m of 'no-man's land' between them. December 1914

would also see the first Christmas of the war.

A few months earlier Pope Benedict XV had begged the warring governments to declare a truce for Christmas, "that the guns may fall silent at least upon the night the angels sang." The Germans gave it serious consideration but the British angrily denounced the Pope.

On 24 December 1914, Christmas Eve, German troops in the region of Ypres, Belgium, began decorating the area around their trenches by placing candles on trees. The British troops watched with a mixture of



confusion and more than a little suspicion. Then the Germans began to sing *Stille Nacht*. While the words may have been unfamiliar the British troops could recognise the tune of *Silent Night*. The British troops responded by singing English carols.

The two sides began shouting Christmas greetings to each other. Many of the Germans had worked or studied in Britain and could speak English fluently. There were calls for the two sides to meet in no-man's land. Tentatively, in ones and twos, troops began leaving the trenches on both sides. Normally if you showed the slightest part of your body above a trench it would be hit by a bullet within seconds. Now people were climbing out of trenches, exposing themselves to the other side.

It must have been a strange feeling for those involved. Earlier that day they had been trying to kill each other, as they had for the past nine months. Now they were standing face to face with the enemy, shaking hands and greeting one another. Troops began to exchange small gifts such as whisky, jam, cigarettes, cigars and chocolate. The artillery in the region fell silent that night and, for the rest of the night, an eerie silence fell over the Western Front.

### Mourning the dead

Early on Christmas morning troops began meeting in no-man's land again. Both sides took the opportunity to bury the many dead that lay in no-man's

land. Proper burials were held and in many instances soldiers from both sides mourned the dead together and paid their respects. In more than one sector informal football matches were arranged in no-man's land. In many sectors, the truce lasted through Christmas night, but in some areas, it continued until New Year's Day.

While the troops at the front may have been enjoying the break, the higher commands on both sides, especially the British, were furious. They ordered the artillery to open fire and gave orders for attacks to take place. After all, this was a war. British commanders Sir John French and Sir Horace Smith-Dorrien vowed that no such truce would be allowed again, although both had left command before Christmas 1915. In all of the following years of the war, artillery bombardments were ordered on Christmas Eve to ensure that there were no further lulls in the combat. Troops were also rotated through various sectors of the front to prevent them from becoming overly familiar with the enemy.

### Celebrated and retold

The Christmas truce of 1914 has been celebrated and retold in songs (such as *Christmas 1914* by Mike Harding; *Christmas in the Trenches* by John McCutcheon; *Belleau Wood* by Garth Brooks; *Pipes of Peace* by Paul McCartney) film (*Joyeux Noel* and *Oh What a Lovely War*) and has also been the subject of a number of books.

In the final episode of *Blackadder*



**FIRE:** British guns fire at a German position. During the Battle of the Somme 1,738,000 shells were fired at the Germans. During this battle the British took over 60,000 casualties on the first day of the battle.

*Goes Forth*, the protagonists discuss events of the past that led them to their current situation, including the Christmas Truce. Captain Edmund Blackadder (Rowan Atkinson) was apparently still sore over being ruled offside during a football game with the Germans. He also cynically muses that "Both sides advanced further during one Christmas piss-up than they did in the next two-and-a half years of war."

On 7 November 2006, Irish singer Chris de Burgh paid £14,400 at Bonham's auction house for an original 10 page letter from an unknown British soldier that records events and incidents with the Germans on that night describing "the most memorable

Christmas I've ever spent".

The letter begins:

*This will be the most memorable Christmas I've ever spent or likely to spend: since about tea time yesterday I don't think there's been a shot fired on either side up to now. Last night turned a very clear frost moonlight night, so soon after dusk we had some decent fires going and had a few carols and songs. The Germans commenced by placing lights all along the edge of their trenches and coming over to us wishing us a Happy Christmas etc.*

*They also gave us a few songs etc. so we had quite a social party. Several of them can speak English very well so we*

had a few conversations. Some of our chaps went to over to their lines. I think they've all come back bar one from 'E' Co. They no doubt kept him as a souvenir. In spite of our fires etc. it was terribly cold and a job to sleep between look out duties, which are two hours in every six.

First thing this morning it was very foggy. So we stood to arms a little longer than usual. A few of us that were lucky could go to Holy Communion early this morning. It was celebrated in a ruined farm about 500 yds behind us.

I unfortunately couldn't go. There must be something in the spirit of Christmas as to day we are all on top of our trenches running about. Whereas other days we have to keep our heads well down. We had breakfast about 8.0 which went down alright especially some cocoa we made. We also had some of the post this morning.

I had a parcel from B. G's Lace Dept containing a sweater, smokes, under clothes etc. We also had a card from the Queen, which I am sending back to you to look after please. After breakfast we had a game of football at the back of our trenches! We've had a few Germans over to see us this morning. They also sent a party over to bury a sniper we shot in the week. He was about a 100 yds from our trench. A few of our fellows went out and helped to bury him.

About 10.30 we had a short church parade the morning service etc. held in the trench. How we did sing. 'O come

all ye faithful. And While shepherds watched their flocks by night' were the hymns we had. At present we are cooking our Christmas Dinner! so will finish this letter later.

Dinner is over! and well we enjoyed it. Our dinner party started off with fried bacon and dip-bread: followed by hot Xmas Pudding. I had a mascot in my piece. Next item on the menu was muscatels and almonds, oranges, bananas, chocolate etc followed by cocoa and smokes. You can guess we thought of the dinners at home. Just before dinner I had the pleasure of shaking hands with several Germans: a party of them came 1/2 way over to us so several of us went out to them. I exchanged one of my balaclavas for a hat. I've also got a button off one of their tunics. We also exchanged smokes etc. and had a decent chat. They say they won't fire tomorrow if we don't so I suppose we shall get a bit of a holiday-perhaps. After exchanging autographs and them wishing us a Happy New Year we departed and came back and had our dinner.

We can hardly believe that we've been firing at them for the last week or two-it all seems so strange. At present its freezing hard and everything is covered with ice...

There are plenty of huge shell holes in front of our trenches, also pieces of shrapnel to be found. I never expected to shake hands with Germans between the firing lines on Christmas Day and I don't suppose you thought of us doing so. So after a fashion we've enjoyed?



**HELLO:** Descendants of Great War veterans, in contemporary uniform, shake hands at the 2008 unveiling of a memorial to the truce.

*our Christmas. Hoping you spend a happy time also George Boy as well. How we thought of England during the day. Kind regards to all the neighbours.*

*With much love from Boy.*

On 11 November 2008, the first official Truce memorial was unveiled in Frelinghein, France, the site of a Christmas Truce football game in 1914. On 21 November 2005, the last remaining Allied veteran of the truce, Alfred Anderson died in Newtyle, Scotland at the age of 109.

## Counting the cost

Nearly 8.5 million soldiers lost their lives during World War I. Germany suffered the highest loss with 1,773,700 followed by Russia with 1,700,000. France suffered 1,357,800 casualties and the British Empire, which included Australia, Canada, India, New Zealand and South Africa, suffered 908,371. The United States of America, who entered the war in 1916, lost 116,516 men.

During World War II the casualty figures were even higher. More than 30 million soldiers died, as did millions of civilians. The Russians alone lost more than 13 million troops.

Since World War II ended in 1945 there has never been a period of more than 24 hours when there hasn't been a war of some sorts going on somewhere.

Let us remember the spirit of the Christmas Truce and pray that our generation and generations to come never have to experience a war and that we never have to calculate the cost of World War III.



# Could you be Santa Claus

## Do you have what it takes to be Santa?

*Oh! You better watch out,  
You better not cry,  
You better not pout,  
I'm telling you why:  
Santa Claus is coming to town!*

The opening verse of the ever popular Christmas song, *Santa Claus is coming to town*. The song was written in 1934 by John Frederick Coots and Haven Gillespie and has been recorded by more than 100 artists - everyone from Alice Cooper to Justin Bieber.

Yet how would you like having the job of Santa Claus? And we're talking about the real-deal here. Not some guy sitting with a false beard at the local shopping mall.

Let's face it, being Santa must be a pretty cool job. After all you only really work one day a year. What he gets up to the other 364 days of the year is anyone's guess.

Another major bonus of being Santa is that you get to play with all the new toys and gadgets way before anyone else.

But before you rush off to send your CV you need to check if you meet the requirements for this post. You will need

certain skills and talents before you can even think about applying for this post.

### Ability to withstand the cold

Remember that you will be based at the North Pole and it does get rather chilly here. The temperature in winter ranges from  $-43^{\circ}\text{C}$  to  $-34^{\circ}\text{C}$  and a temperature of  $0^{\circ}\text{C}$  would be regarded as a hot summer's day.

### Fashion sense

You need to look good in red. If this colour does not suit you, then please do not bother applying for the post.

### Fuzz face

Part of the job requires that you wear a beard and mustache the entire year. Your beard and mustache can be any colour you wish - as long as it is white.

### Gifted with languages

There are roughly 6,500 languages spoken around the world. As Santa you will have to be able to speak all of them.

After all, kids will be sending you letters telling you what they want for Christmas, so you had better know what

they're asking for.

In many countries you will be known by different names. For example in Afghanistan you are *Baba Chaghloo*, in Poland you are *Swiety Mikolaj* and in China you are *Dun Che Lao Ren*. Get to know your names.

### Attention to detail

Another verse of *Santa Claus is coming to town* says "He's making a list, and checking it twice; Gonna find out Who's naughty and nice."

Just imagine if someone has been nice and you put them on the naughty list? You could end up being sued.

### An outstanding memory

These days Santa makes use of a Tablet or iPad and a GPS to track the names and addresses of everyone he has to deliver gifts to. Yet you still need to have an excellent memory.

You have thousands of elves working for you at your workshop at the North Pole.

These elves get very upset if you don't remember their names. They could go on strike and cause a shutdown.

### Stealth, cunning and an armoured skin

The job of travelling around the world delivering

gifts has become hazardous over the past decade or so. You face the risk of having your sleigh hijacked and you will also have to put up with guard dogs, electric fences, elaborate security systems and armed reaction guards.

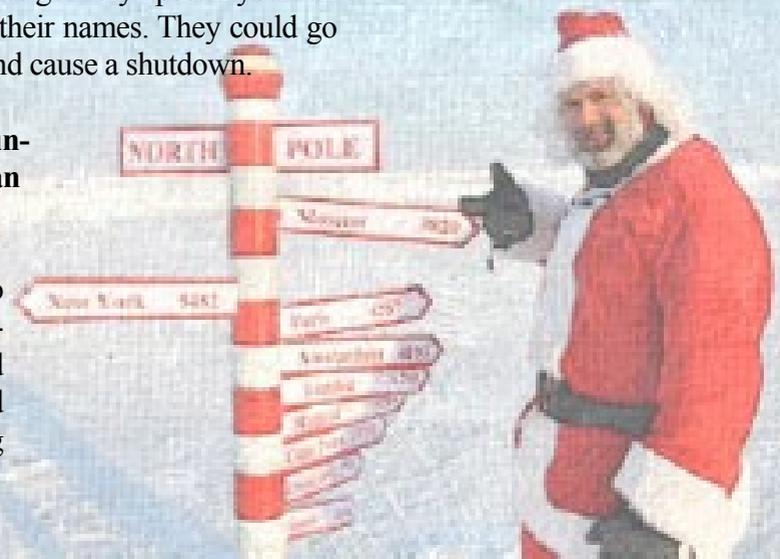
Some countries have 'no-fly zones' and you risk having your sleigh shot down by fighter jets or surface-to-air missiles.

Worst of all - many people just don't believe in you anymore.

### Health issues

Let's see, how do we put this. You need to be of ample proportions? You need to be rotund? Oh to hell with it, you need to be fat and jolly.

If you are still interested in applying for the post, send a detailed CV to: Santa Pty Ltd, 317 Frostbite Corner, North Pole. And good luck with your application. ■



# Christmas time, mistletoe and wine

Many of us had the pleasure of spending an all expenses paid Christmas vacation on the border, courtesy of the South African Defence Force.

Something that was always important to any troop, and especially at Christmas, was food. Here are a few stories about the topic of food and of Christmas.

Steve was 19 when he did national service and ended up as a corporal at 1 SAI in Bloemfontein. He remembers an incident that left him rolling with laughter. It also earned him seven extra duties.

During my two-year period of national service I was a corporal at 1 SAI in Bloemfontein. One Sunday I was BOS (Battalion Orderly Sergeant) and one of my duties was to visit the troops mess during lunch to see that everyone had been fed and was happy with the food.

One this particular Sunday the RSM of the unit arrived and said that he would accompany me on my inspection. We walked into the mess and there was about three hundred troops sitting eating.

“Everything all right?” asked the RSM in his booming voice. “How is the food?”

“The food is crap,” chirped a voice from the back of the mess, “not even a dog would eat this shit.”

The RSM immediately demanded to know who had made the comment.

Of course no one was going to own up. The RSM was really furious. He told the staff sergeant in charge of the kitchen that no one was to leave the mess until he returned. Then he told me to come with him and we climbed into his Land Rover and set off for the local SPCA. He found this really mangy dog and loaded it into the back of the Land Rover where I had to sit and look after it.

On our return he brought the dog back to the mess and told them to dish up a plate of food. He put the plate on the floor in front of the dog. The dog was obviously starving because it wolfed down the plate of food in about three gulps.

“There!” bellowed the RSM, obviously feeling justified. “You see, this food is fit for a dog!”

With that, the dog sat down and began licking its bum. The same voice that had made the comment about the food earlier piped up, “It’s trying to get rid of the taste of the food.”

Everyone in the place, with the exception of the RSM, burst into laughter. It was too much for me and I was crying with laughter.

“What’s so bloody funny corporal? Are you mad,” the RSM berated me.

I ended up getting seven extra duties for being insubordinate to the RSM, but it was worth every one of the extra

duties, believe me. As for the dog, it was ‘adopted’ by the kitchen staff and was aptly named ‘Lunchtime’.

Christmas, that special time of the year reserved for family and friends, good food, goodwill, and exchanging gifts. Yet for the troops on the border it was just another day at the office.

Maybe that statement is a little unfair. The SADF did try and do something special for the troops over the Christmas period.

At the larger bases such as Grootfontein, Oshakati, Rundu, Katima Mulilo, Mapacha, etc., a special Christmas lunch was held. At the smaller bases this was not always possible because the troops would often be involved with patrols on Christmas Day. In these cases Christmas lunch was usually served over a number of days. Max (18) has good reason to remember his Christmas on the border.

I spent Christmas 1978 on the border. I was with the Signals Corps and was attached to a base called Okalongo in Owamboland. I think 4 SAI was there at the time and I was one of their three signallers responsible for communications.

Because of the fact that guys would be out on patrol, they had three Christmas brunches. One was on the 16th December, one on the 20th December, and the last one on Christmas Day. In this manner everyone had a chance to get a decent Christmas meal.

As a signaller I did not go out on pa-

trols but remained at the base camp the entire time. This meant that I was able to enjoy not one but three Christmas meals that year. I can still remember what was served. It was steak, roast chicken, roast potatoes, corn, peas, and gravy. Afterwards we had trifle and everyone was given two beers or two tins of cold drink. It was kind of cool.

## More turkey here Sergeant Major

Some of the Christmas lunches at the larger base camps were pretty elaborate affairs and the food was of the highest quality. Certain units had long traditions regarding the Christmas meal, as David (18) explains.

We had a tradition in our unit that on Christmas day the officers and senior NCOs had to serve the troops lunch. We all sat down at these long tables that were covered with white table clothes and were decorated with Christmas crackers. Everyone got a little paper hat to wear and there were bottles of wine on the table.

Then our OC and RSM led in the officers and senior NCOs to serve the food. They came around with trays and served us individually. It was really great fun.

Our company sergeant major was a scream. He came in wearing his army boots, a paper hat, and a white apron and nothing else. Here he was walking around bare-arsed asking if we’d had enough to eat. I laughed so much that I nearly choked on my food. I think that it was an excellent tradition and I



wonder if they still do things like that today?

### I was there

Christmas time was also an occasion when the Southern Cross Fund came to the fore. They would ensure that every single troop serving on the border would receive a Christmas gift.

From its foundation in 1968, the year compulsory national service began, the Southern Cross Fund collected millions of rands in donations from companies and individuals. This money was used to purchase facilities and equipment for camps throughout South Africa and South West Africa and this equipment included the likes of swimming pools, trampolines, water coolers, books, TV sets, video recorders, and, of course, Christmas parcels for the troops.

It was a very touching and thoughtful gesture, although not everyone appreciated the gifts. Steve (19) tells us more.

I was on the border in 1977 and for Christmas we received a gift from the

'Dankie Tannies'. It was an imitation leather writing bag and in it was a Parker pen, a writing pad, a packet of peanuts, two packets of chewing gum, a packet of cigarettes, and a tee shirt. I know that later on they stopped including cigarettes in the packs because smoking became a big issue.

The army also gave us a set of Christmas cards that we could send home to our family and friends. It was a drawing of Father Christmas in the back of a Buffel.

The tee shirt they gave us was really GV. It had a drawing on the front that was so patriotic that it made you laugh. It was a drawing of a SADF troop kneeling in the bush, pointing his rifle at some target. An Alouette helicopter was flying overhead. Above the drawing were the words 'I was there!' and under the drawing stood the Afrikaans version, "Ek was daar!"

I swapped my tee shirt for six beers at the local cuca shop. During the next few weeks I saw a fair number of local Owambo's walking around proudly wearing their 'I was there' tee shirts. I guess that quite a few guys had the same idea as me.

I trust that you will all have a very Happy Christmas and that the New Year will be good to you.

And those of you from other shell-holes that are reading this, everything of the best for the season from Admiral Halifax Shellhole to all of you.

# 4 Stages of Christmas

## BELIEVING IN SANTA



## NOT BELIEVING IN SANTA



## BEING SANTA



## LOOKING LIKE SANTA



# All hail the PC Brigade

In our politically correct world RYAN MURPHY wonders how long it will be before the PC Police start finding fault with traditional Christmas songs.

We live in a world that is becoming more PC (politically correct) by the day. You need to think long and hard before you open your mouth, just in case you inadvertently offend someone.

Make a statement such as; “it was as easy as taking candy from a baby” and the next thing you know you’re accused of child abuse.

Or say something such as; “the room wasn’t big enough to swing a cat in” and the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals is on your case.

These days people are no longer fat, they are horizontally challenged. Short people are now vertically challenged. You will no longer find a chairman of an organisation, they are now chairpersons. You won’t find anyone that is stupid anymore, they are now intellectually challenged. People do not steal anymore, they misappropriate something.

And be very, very careful about what you post to social media. The wrong comment on Facebook or Twitter can land you in a hole so deep you’ll never see the surface again.

What is alarming is that as we become more politically correct it will only be a matter of time before the PC Police start paying attention to other

aspects of society. How long will it be before they start finding fault with traditional Christmas songs? Here is a small taste of what the future could bring.

## Jingle Bells

*Dashing through the snow  
In a one horse open sleigh  
O’er the fields we go  
Laughing all the way*

A risk assessment must be submitted before an open sleigh is considered safe for members of the public to travel on.

The risk assessment must also consider whether it is appropriate to use only one horse for such a venture, particularly if passengers are of larger proportions.

Please note, permission must be gained from landowners before entering their fields. To avoid offending those not participating in celebrations, we would request that laughter is moderate only and not loud enough to be considered a noise nuisance.

## While Shepherds Watched

*While shepherds watched  
Their flocks by night  
All seated on the ground*

*The angel of the Lord came down  
And glory shone around*

The union of Shepherd’s has complained that it breaches health and safety regulations to insist that shepherds watch their flocks without appropriate seating arrangements being provided, therefore benches, stools and orthopedic chairs are now available.

Shepherds have also requested that due to the inclement weather conditions at this time of year that they should watch their flocks via CCTV cameras from centrally heated shepherd observation huts.

Please note, the angel of the lord is reminded that before shining his / her glory all around she / he must ascertain that all shepherds have been issued with glasses capable of filtering out the harmful effects of UVA, UVB and Glory.

## Little Donkey

*Little donkey, little donkey on the dusty road  
Got to keep on plodding onwards with your precious load*

The Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (SPCA) have issued strict guidelines with regard to how heavy a load that a donkey of small stature is permitted to carry, also included in the guidelines is guidance regarding how often to feed the donkey and how many rest breaks are required over a four hour plodding period.

Please note that due to the increased

risk of pollution from the dusty road, Mary and Joseph are required to wear face masks to prevent inhalation of any airborne particles.

The donkey has expressed his discomfort at being labelled ‘little’ and would prefer just to be simply referred to as Mr. Donkey. To comment upon his height or lack thereof may be considered an infringement of his equine rights.

While on the subject, Mr. Donkey takes offence to his walk being referred to as ‘plodding’. It is in fact a dignified gait.

## We Three Kings

*We three kings of Orient are  
Bearing gifts we traverse afar  
Field and fountain, moor and mountain  
Following yonder star*

Whilst the gift of gold is still considered acceptable - as it may be redeemed at a later date through such organisations as ‘cash for gold’ etc, gifts of frankincense and myrrh are not appropriate due to the potential risk of oils and fragrances causing allergic reactions.

A suggested gift alternative would be to make a donation to a worthy cause in the recipient’s name or perhaps give a gift voucher.

We would not advise that the traversing kings rely on navigation by stars in order to reach their destinations and suggest the use of GPS satellite navigation, which will provide the

quickest route and advice regarding fuel consumption.

Please note as per the guidelines from the SPCA for Mr Donkey, the camels carrying the three kings of Orient will require regular food and rest breaks.

Face masks for the three kings are also advisable due to the likelihood of dust from the camel's hooves.

Once again we must also stress that if the route plans to cross private property, written permission should be obtained in advance and compensation, if necessary, must be made to the owners of the land.

### **Rudolph the red nosed reindeer**

*Rudolph, the red-nosed reindeer  
had a very shiny nose.  
And if you ever saw him,  
you would even say it glows.*

You are advised that under the Equal Opportunities for All policy, it is inappropriate for persons to make comment with regard to the ruddiness of any part of Mr. R. Reindeer.

It is also illegal to make accusations that Mr. R. Reindeer's red, shiny nose is a result of drinking on duty without the necessary medical proof.

Further to this, exclusion of Mr R Reindeer from the Reindeer Games will be considered discriminatory and disciplinary action will be taken against those found guilty of this offence.

A full investigation will be implemented and sanctions - including sus-

pension on full pay - will be considered whilst this investigation takes place.

And that's just some of the traditional Christmas songs they can look at. It makes me shiver at the mere thought.

Now anyone that knows me even remotely knows that I am anything but PC. I will not call a manhole cover a 'personhole cover', nor will I talk about a 'chairperson'. And when I go to a restaurant I expect to be served by a waiter or waitress, not a 'waitron'. The world waitron sounds as if it's a bloody robot of some sort.

So let me take this opportunity to wish you all a very good Christmas and New Year. Thanks for your supportive comments throughout the year. Now if I could just get Matt to actually pay me for my work.

And if you're using the roads over the festive season, keep it safe and watch out for idiots on the road.

Until 2017 then.



**To all our readers from  
all of us at Admiral  
Halifax.**

**Thanks for your  
support dur-  
ing the year.  
Here's wishing  
you everything  
of the best for  
Christmas and  
a peaceful and  
prosperous New  
Year.**

# By the left, quick laugh



Santa always delivers the goods on time.

After the Antarctic Affirmative Action programme Santa was relegated to tail gunner on the sleigh.



Delivering gifts in South Africa is getting more difficult every year.



Well, you did say that the code name for this mission was Operation Christmas. And you did tell us to dress appropriately.



Santa and his little elves.

