

**WOLFNOTE SUMMARY OF...**

**ERICH MARIA REMARQUE'S**

**ALL QUIET ON THE WESTERN FRONT**



**SYNOPSIS**

Paul Bäumer narrates the story entitled 'All Quiet on the Western Front', where the German army faces French, British and American forces during World War I. Paul and several of his school friends were inspired by their teacher Kantorek to enlist in order to fight for the German Fatherland.

Their first ten weeks in the army involved a strict training regime where they were under the command of a cruel, sadistic Corporal named Himmelstoss. They soon realized that the air of patriotism that had encouraged them to enlist was false, and was soon blown away by the realities of war. They were soon consumed by a physical terror of what faced them. There was no glory and honor in this war.

Paul was part of a company comprising 150 men. After two weeks of fighting, this had been reduced to 80. During a short break from the Front, Paul tells us of an incident concerning food to be provided for their company. The cook had provided meals for the full 150 contingent, and the survivors requested that they should receive the rations of their dead comrades. The cook refused as he was under orders to give each man a single ration, but seeing their determination, the cook soon relents.

Paul takes the opportunity to visit one of his former classmates, Kemmerich who had received a fairly insignificant wound, but this was now gangrenous and it was clear that Kemmerich would soon die. Already desensitized, Paul and another classmate Muller were more concerned about the fate of Kemmerich's boots. We learn that the German troops are poorly supplied, and having a good pair of boots was most important. Paul remains at Kemmerich's bedside until the young man dies, and his boots are passed to Muller.

Paul is only nineteen years of age, but having survived a comparatively short period at the Front he has now become a veteran. Even younger recruits arrive at the Front to reinforce Paul's company.

Paul has become close friends with a forty-year-old soldier whose nickname is Kat. He is a scrounger and is able to produce reasonable food from apparently nowhere. Kat has specific views concerning the war. He considers it would be over very quickly if those at the top received the same rations as the ordinary soldier. Kropp, another classmate of Paul, thinks that both sides should do away with their armies and let the nation's leaders do the fighting.

When the volunteers learn that their cruel instructor Himmelstoss has been posted to the Front, they decide that they will get their revenge on this sadistic Corporal. They manage to ambush him and they cover him in a sheet and give him a severe beating.

One night Paul and a few others are sent on a mission to lay barbed wire at the Front. They are pounded by artillery and are forced to hide in a graveyard. The severe shelling brings chaos to the burial ground, and the men are forced to lie with the corpses, seeking cover from the shells. The older men at the Front have something to look forward to at the end of the war. They have families and jobs to return to, but Paul and his contemporaries feel isolated. All they know is the war, and they cannot imagine what life would be like outside this theatre.

The resourceful Kat manages to find a house with a goose in it, which they kill and roast, and they enjoy the rare good meal.

The tremendous loss of life continues and we witness through Paul's words the grotesque scenes of trench warfare. The few that survive are given a short reprieve at a Field Depot, and Paul with his few remaining friends goes for a swim and they liaise with a group of French girls.

Paul is granted a period of leave and he goes home to see his family. He feels strangely awkward, for he is unable to share the trauma he has experienced. His mother is dying of cancer. He also visits Kemmerich's mother and lies to her about her son's death, saying that it was quick and painless.

The school teacher Kantorek has been conscripted and Paul gets some satisfaction from this news.

Paul comes into contact with some Russian prisoners of war and he soon realizes that the propaganda regarding the Russians is false. The Russian soldiers are just like him. They are not subhuman enemies.

Paul is then sent back to his company and he is soon backing into the thick of open warfare. During a chaotic charge, Paul is separated from his comrades and hides in a shell-hole from the artillery. He is soon joined by a French soldier and Paul instinctively stabs and murders the Frenchman. He is overcome with remorse at having to kill this enemy, but he soon realizes that the two of them are victims of war. Paul

looks through the soldier's personal effects and is able to put a name to the Frenchman and learns that he is married with a child. Eventually he makes it back to his own lines where he recounts his adventure to his friends who try to console him.

Kat has managed to secure them an easy duty guarding a supply depot away from the fighting. They are able to enjoy decent rations and valuable time to recoup their energy.

In the next engagement both Paul and Kropp are wounded and they are placed on the same hospital train. Unfortunately Kropp has his leg amputated, which means he will never be able to pursue his ambition of being a forester. Paul undergoes surgery for the removal of shrapnel. When he recovers, he returns to the Front Line, but the German army is beginning to give way under the allied pressure.

Paul's remaining friends are all killed and he is last one left of the original company.

In the autumn of 1918, rumors abound that German will soon surrender. Paul is again injured, this time through a poisoned gas attack and he knows that this will be a permanent injury that he will not be able to fully recover from. He is again sent back to the Front Line in October 1918. This time, Paul is killed. Unusually, it was a quiet day in the trenches. The army report for that day reads, "All quiet on the Western Front."

Observers note that Paul's expression was one of calm and tranquility.

### **THE AUTHOR**

Erich Paul Remark was born in Northern Germany on June 22<sup>nd</sup> 1898 in the town of Osnabrück. He used the name Erich Maria Remarque when 'All Quiet on the Western Front' was published. The middle name of Maria was used in memory of his mother, and he changed the spelling of his surname in order to disassociate himself from his early writings.

Of course his first book was published in German, and it was called 'Im Westen Nichts Neues' which literally translated means 'Nothing New on the Western Front'.

Remarque was in his mid teens when the First World War broke out. He had obtained his education from Catholic schools. He was called up for military service in November 1916 where he trained at the barracks situated in Osnabrück. It is widely believed that the Caprivi Barracks in Osnabrück are the very same as the Klosterberg Barracks, described in the novel.

He was sent to the Western Front during the offensive on the Flanders fields in July 1917, known by the allied forces as Passchendaele. Remarque was wounded in this engagement and was taken to Duisburg Hospital. During this time his mother died and when Remarque recovered, he obtained a position as clerk in the hospital. He managed to see out the rest of the war without seeing further action, and he was part of the post war teacher training program, but he soon realized that this vocation did not suit him.

He had various jobs after the teaching position, one being as a stonecutter in the cemetery of his home town. This time inspired him to later write the novel entitled 'The Black Obelisk'. For a time he wandered in a gypsy caravan around Germany until he obtained a position as a test driver for a Berlin tire company. This led to him writing articles for a Swiss automobile magazine. Remarque became more and more interested in automobiles, particularly racing and mechanical engineering, and this was to provide the basis of his novel 'Heaven Knows No Favorites'.

In 1924, he secured a permanent position with a sporting magazine called 'Sport Im Bild' (Sport in Pictures), based in Berlin.

In 1925 he married a dancer, Jutta Zambona, but the marriage only lasted six years.

In 1928, 'All Quiet on the Western Front' was eventually published and enjoyed immediate success. Over 1 million copies were sold in the first year of publication, and it was soon translated into French and English, where it enjoyed equal popularity. Eventually, during the 1930's, the book would be translated and published in twenty-five languages.

When the Nazis came to power in 1933, Remarque's book about the First World War was regarded as a betrayal of the German front line soldier. Remarque fled to Switzerland whilst at home in Germany, his books were burnt.

In 1938 the Nazi government withdrew his German citizenship. During this time he remarried Jutta so that she too could flee from Germany, but it is widely believed they lived apart. They were eventually divorced in 1951 for the second time.

Remarque was great friends with Marlene Dietrich and she helped him get an American visa. He left Europe on the last trans-Atlantic sailing of the Queen Mary before World War II. He was one of the important members of the New York and Hollywood socialites, rubbing shoulders with other famous European immigrants who had fled the fascist movements in Europe. Apart from Marlene, he was also seen in the company of Greta Garbo. Unfortunately, his sister remained behind in Germany and she was executed by the Nazis in 1943, supposedly for voicing defeatist comments, but also because she was the sister of the famous Erich Maria Remarque. She would have a street named after her in her home town of Osnabrück.

Remarque was granted American citizenship in 1947, but despite encouragement from his friends, refused to reapply for his German citizenship, saying that it had been taken away from him illegally. He returned to Switzerland in the late 1940's where he was to spend the rest of his life. He married the British actress Paulette Goddard in 1958.

Remarque never forgot his experiences in the trenches on the Western Front. He had the constant physical reminders in that he always had respiratory problems. Much of his work is clearly influenced by his First World War experiences.

His major works include – 'The Road Back' 1931; 'Three Comrades' 1937; 'Flotsam' 1941; 'Arch of Triumph' 1946; 'Spark of Life' 1952; 'A Time to Love and a Time to Die' 1954; 'The Black Obelisk' 1957; 'Heaven Has No Favorites' 1961; and 'Night in Lisbon' 1964. 'The Road Back' is considered as a sequel to 'All Quiet' in which the narrator is clearly Paul Bäumer brought back to life. 'The Three Comrades' deals with life in Germany between the two wars and 'The Spark of Life' are set in a concentration camp, and are also vividly portrayed. The book 'A Time to Love and a Time to Die' deals with life on the Eastern Front in the early 1940's.

Remarque died on September 25<sup>th</sup> 1970 of heart failure and was buried in Switzerland.

## **CHARACTERS**

### **PAUL BÄUMER**

Paul is the narrator of the story who, together with some of his classmates, volunteers for military service. He provides us with a first-hand description of his suffering on the Western Front and also documents the views of those around him.

### **STANISLAUS KATCZINSKY**

Kat as he is known becomes Paul's best friend. He is the unofficial leader of Paul's group of soldiers and is aged around forty. He is the scrounger of the group and miraculously produces food and soft jobs for those around him.

### **LEER**

One of Paul's young classmates, Leer is admired by the other young soldiers, as he is the first in the group to have had a sexual experience with a woman.

### **FRANTZ KEMMERICH**

Another school chum of Paul, Kemmerich, dies early on in the story following a leg amputation. His fine leather boots are to travel through the story and live as long as Paul.

### **MULLER**

Another of Paul's schoolmates, Muller vainly clings onto the past by keeping his school books with him and dreams about school examinations. He is the first to inherit Kemmerich's boots.

### **ALBERT KROPP**

Regarded by the other students as the best in Paul's class, Kropp is the first to be promoted to Lance Corporal. He too loses a leg, but survives and is discharged.

### **DETERING**

Formerly a farmer, Detering is a soldier in the same group as Paul. He fondly thinks of his farm and wife waiting for him when the war is over.

### **KANTOREK**

Paul's school master who urges his students to enlist in order to help the Fatherland. He is to become the object of hate from those that volunteered, but ironically he too is called up and ends up under the authority of a former pupil.

### **CORPORAL HIMMELSTOSS**

He is the Drill Master for Paul and the other volunteers at the training barracks. He was a former postman, but relishes the power given to him as a result of the war. He is a sadist and treats the students badly, but they confess that his attitude helped them prepare for the worst horrors at the Front.

### **TJADEN**

A young thin soldier, Tjaden is slightly older than Paul and his classmates. He was a locksmith in civilian life and although he is very thin, has an immense appetite.

### **GERALD DUVAL**

A French soldier who shares the same shell-hole as Paul. Paul stabs the French soldier and he dies. Paul discovers the identity of the French soldier and realizes that he is more than just an enemy; he is a victim like himself, who is married with a child.

## **BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

### **WORLD WAR I : 1914 – 1918**

In the years before 1914, various pacts were drawn up between the major nations in Europe. On one side you had the colonial powers of Great Britain, France and Russia, and on the other side were Germany, Austria and Hungary. Both sides had been building up their armed forces and on June 28<sup>th</sup> 1914 when the Austrian Grand Duke was assassinated at Sarajevo in Serbia, the ingredients for full-blown warfare in Europe were in place.

Austria declared war on Serbia, and Serbia's ally Russia mobilized their army. Germany then declared war on Russia and within days France and Britain declared war on Germany. As a result, fighting was to break out on the Eastern and Western flanks of Germany.

The Western Front stretched from the Belgian coast to Switzerland. It was fortified on both sides with trenches, barbed wire and artillery. For three-and-a-half years there was stalemate with neither side making any significant progress from the original battle lines that had been drawn up. During this period of time, millions of lives were lost in useless offensives.

On the Eastern Front, the war was more mobile, and although each side enjoyed more successful advances, because both sides were evenly matched, what would be a significant gain one month would turn into a defeat the following month.

This was a land war, the only significant sea battle being the Battle of Jutland in 1916.

The balance of power was altered with the entry of the U.S.A. into the conflict in 1917, which followed German submarines sinking neutral American ships. Increased support from the French and British colonies also enabled the extension of the Fronts, notably the invasion from the south by Australian troops.

Eventually, the strain on Russia took its toll and this led to the Revolution in 1917, and the Bolshevik government arranged an armistice with Germany in 1918. This provided a brief respite for the overstrained German war machine, as they could now transfer troops from the Eastern to the Western Front. This only prolonged the inevitable and with the increased input of fresh American troops, the German lines were finally broken and overrun. To the south, the Italian army defeated the Austrians and the German government was forced to surrender and sign the Peace Treaty at Versailles.

During these four years, the vast majority of the European Continent became a huge war machine that consumed the able men of many countries. Remarque's story is not aimed at providing a German aspect, but a universal picture on the futility of war and the experiences endured by British, American, French, Russian and German troops alike. This is why the novel has such universal appeal. It is a study of the effects of war on the human spirit.

### **THE AUTHOR'S INTRODUCTORY NOTE**

Bearing in mind the political situation in Germany between the wars, Remarque felt it necessary to provide a brief statement regarding the novel's purpose.

He makes it clear that he is not aligned with any political party, and he warns the reader that the book is also a statement on the relevance of war and not an exciting adventure.

Remarque was particularly concerned about the effects of war on young men - those that had, like him, left school to go straight to the Front without having any adult experiences. This generation was by and large destroyed by the war machine, whether they survived the conflict or not, for they had no other adult experience other than warfare. They never had the opportunity to have sweethearts, children, or careers. All this was lost to them, and all those that did survive the war to live on afterwards led lives that were tainted by the horrors they had lived through.

Remarque makes it clear that this war machine governs all who are consumed by it. They no longer think for themselves, but are driven on relentlessly against the conditions prevalent at the Front Line. They seldom looked their enemy in the face. They were killed by a distant enemy whether it is an artillery shell or an infected wound.

As a result of the Great War, the world would never be the same. Those things that had been held sacred before the war, the ideals and beliefs that were so important then were seen in a new perspective by those that emerged from the trenches in 1918.

The 20<sup>th</sup> Century burgeoned with so much hope and expectancy, but it was crushed during the second decade due to the avarice drive of the chosen few who ruled prior to the Great War.

## **CHAPTERS 1 and 2**

### **Summary**

This story is narrated by Paul Bäumer and concerns his experiences and those of the other members of his company of soldiers fighting on the Western Front during the First World War. After two weeks of continual fighting, Paul's company of 150 men has been reduced to 80.

Paul had volunteered for military service along with his classmates, Leer, Muller and Kropp all of whom are 19 years old. Other notable members of Paul's immediate circle of soldiers are Tjaden who was formerly a locksmith, Haie who used to be a peat digger, and Deterring a peasant farmer who often thinks of his wife and family at home. The unofficial leader of their group is Katczinsky (Kat for short). He is 40 years old and has survived so far due to his cunning.

Paul describes the scene where they line up for breakfast and the cook has mistakenly prepared rations for 150 men, but only 80 have survived to eat this meal. Those present quickly claim the rations in place of their fallen comrades, but the cook insists that he has been given orders only to distribute single rations. A heated argument follows and the cook finally relents to distribute all the food. The men rest after their breakfast and relax playing cards and having a well-earned smoke.

Paul wonders how another classmate; Kemmerich is doing after he had received a thigh wound. Some of the men visit him in the hospital and he is in a poor state, close to death. He has had his leg amputated because the wound became infected and he developed gangrene. Muller quickly realizes that Kemmerich will no longer require his fine boots, and puts a claim in for them. He might as well benefit from them because the orderlies will steal them for themselves. Paul remains by Kemmerich's bedside until he dies and then takes the boots for Muller.

Paul recalls his schooldays and how his teacher Kantorek had encouraged his pupils to enlist for the Front. He told them it was their duty to fight and protect the Fatherland.

One of the students, Joseph Behm was reluctant to enlist, but Kantorek's persistence eventually persuaded Joseph to enlist. He was one of the first of Paul's school mates to die, and his death was particularly horrible. This incident was the turning point for Paul and his classmates, who lost their boyhood and no longer respected those in authority such as Kantorek.

Chapter 2 opens with Paul reminiscing about his earlier life, but it is surreal because this world now seems so vague and distant.

Paul and his schoolmates feel isolated from the normal world because they have gone straight from school to the Front Line. Some of the others in their group, like Deterring, have something to look forward to when the war ends, but Paul and other 19 year olds have not had the opportunity to develop their careers, start hobbies and begin families. All they know is the bleak landscape on the Front Line.

Paul muses that he has learnt far more in the ten weeks of military training than he learnt spending ten years at school. From being an astute schoolboy, Paul has reverted to an unthinking cog in the war machine.

Whilst they were at the training barracks they were commanded by Corporal Himmelstoss. In civilian life he was a mail man, but he relishes the power given to him by the onset of war. He treats the new recruits sadistically, trying to break their spirit. During their training, all the recruits hated this Corporal, but now they recognize that his training has been essential for their survival. At the training barracks they developed a camaraderie, which endures with them still.

### **Interpretation**

Remarque takes us straight to the horrors of World War I with little warning or preparation.

This book broke the mould concerning war novels. Up until this time such pieces of literature concentrated on the glory and heroism of war. There was almost a romantic tone to these testimonies of warfare. Remarque emphasizes the terror and dehumanizing effect that the trench warfare had on the soldiers.

Paul and his fellow students soon lose their youthfulness. They are aged beyond their years and they have lost their idealism in the mud and gore of the Front Line. Paul and the rest were sucked into believing the propaganda spouted by their teacher, and were quite keen to enlist as volunteers in order to prove their patriotism. Even Joseph Behm, who was not keen to enlist, was swept along on the tide of hysteria. He is one of the first of the boys from the school to die. We learn that he is 'a tubby, cheerful chap'. He meets his death as follows, "He was shot in the eye during an attack, and we left him for dead. We couldn't take him with us because we had to get back in a great rush ourselves. That afternoon we suddenly heard him shout out and saw him crawling around in no man's land. He had only been knocked unconscious. Because he couldn't see and was mad with pain he didn't take cover, so he was shot down from the other side before anyone could get out fetching him."

Of course the horrors are not confined to the battlefield and there are also grisly sights in the Field Hospital. Kemmerich had suffered a fairly minor wound to his thigh, but this had become infected and his leg had to be amputated. Paul is concerned about his comrade because he looks ghastly, but the doctor refuses to come and see to him. He has already amputated five legs today and cannot face any more.



In every direction that Paul turns there are the horrors of war. He stays with Kemmerich to the end and then flees the hospital and we read, "Once I get outside, the darkness and the wind are a salvation. I breathe as deeply as I can, and feel the air warmer and softer than every before in my face. Images of girls, fields of flowers, of white clouds all pass rapidly through my mind. My feet move onwards in my boots, I am going faster, I am running ..... The whole earth is suffused with power and its streaming into me, up through the souls of my feet. The night crackles with electricity; there is a dull thundering from the Front Line, like some concerto for kettledrums." Momentarily Paul escapes the horrors, but the incessant booming of the guns brings him back to reality.

Paul has taken Kemmerich's boots for Muller. Again we learn how poorly the soldiers are provided for in both food and equipment. Many of those who lived in the trenches suffered from trench foot. This was a degenerative disease of the feet caused by prolonged immersion in cold water. We will learn that the boots outlive many owners during this story.

We soon appreciate that our small band of heroes are not just fighting the Allied Forces, but are fighting against the conditions they have to endure. The men are merely cogs and wheels of a gigantic war machine that stretches for hundreds of miles. The machine uses up these cogs and wheels at a fantastic rate, but nobody has the wit to switch the machine off. Only when both sides have run out of materials will the machine be starved and grind to a halt.

One cannot underestimate the power of propaganda in this conflict. Not only does the school master urge his students to enlist, but they are also under the same pressure from all members of society. They are urged to protect the Fatherland because right is on their side and the war will soon be over. The same situation prevails with the Allies. In England all able-bodied men were encouraged to enlist. It was a time when there was unquestionable loyalty to the state. Even after World War I there were still many who thought that war was an honorable campaign.

It was through books such as this that the realities of modern warfare were brought home to the next generation. The book's authenticity is underlined by the fact that Remarque actually experienced first hand the horrors of war. Remarque also emphasizes the desensitization of the soldiers. They are not concerned about the number of their dead comrades, only what is to happen to their food rations. Although we can read about the life endured in the trenches, one has to experience it first hand to truly appreciate it, but we note that Paul and his comrades are all equally changed by these experiences as is evident in their callous attitude regarding the dead men's rations, and who will be the next owner of Kemmerich's boots.

Paul describes the episode concerning the mail received by the soldiers and there is one from Kantorek who calls his students 'the iron youth'. Kantorek views them as being young and strong, but they are aged beyond their years and tremble in the trenches when they are under artillery fire.

It is important that the reader should try and identify himself with Paul as the story unfolds. It is a key element for fully appreciating the novel because the main message that Remarque is trying to make is carried through the book by Paul. Paul and his comrades are now trapped in this hell. Their only escape is through death or injury. They feel that those who urged them to enlist have betrayed them, have sent them to be slaughtered, all in the guise of patriotism, which they now view as an empty vessel.

We witness their moral degeneration, the loss the values they held so dear when back at home. This moral decay is shared by all at the Front Line. We note that the patients in the Field Hospital lose their valued possessions, which are stolen by the orderlies - for example Kemmerich's watch disappears. It was noted that in the years after the First World War there was a general decline in moral standards throughout society.

In Chapter 2 we learn more about Paul. He may have had a promising literary career, for he had written poetry and had attempted being a playwright. He is still capable, of course, of having strong feelings, illustrated to his reaction to Kemmerich's unnecessary death. Perhaps this is one of the reasons why his own desire to survive is so strong, because of the experiences he has had with death.

Paul is, of course, Remarque's mouthpiece and we are conscious that he is trying to present these experiences as honestly as possible.

In the end Paul realizes that in order to survive both physically and mentally, he has to shut himself off from his feelings. He is powerless to do anything about his situation. He must stay sharp and survive and not let his feelings interfere with his performance as a soldier.

The reader soon learns that life has no value. This is underlined by the fact that Kemmerich's boots become an important symbol. They signify the cheapness of life.

The main purpose of these Chapters is to set the scene and provide the atmosphere on the Western Front. Historically speaking, we are approaching the end of the war and Germany is on its back foot. The initial stream of German victories has now dried up, and the reinforced Allies now threaten to overrun the German positions.

Although this story is told from a German point of view, the message is clearly universal and can easily be applied to the Allied side. As we have said before, this is not an adventure story; it is a tale of death, destruction and desolation. In this setting toil the soldiers who have lost all hope.

### **CHAPTER 3**

#### **Summary**

Paul's company receives a batch of new recruits to replace the dead and wounded.

Seeing these new lambs arrive for the slaughter, Paul and the others feel like hardened veterans. Some of these recruits are only seventeen years old.

Kat is a valuable member of the group. He is adept at scrounging extra food and provisions. He is a true survivor and makes the most of life in the trenches. Kat and Kropp both put forward ideas that would bring the war to an end quickly, or even stop it starting in the first place. Kat thinks that if everybody in the war received the same food and pay, it would soon be over. Kropp thinks that the war should be restricted to the Generals and leaders, and they should face one another in an arena and fight each other with clubs.

Strangely, Paul and his friends remember how life was much easier back at the training barracks. Even the sadistic Himmelstoss seems mild compared to the realities of war. Kat, an astute judge of character, recognizes that Himmelstoss is the type of small-minded power-hungry man that uses war as a vehicle with which to pursue their cruelty. The army runs on power. Those above you wield their power over you and control you. The group learns that Himmelstoss is coming up to the Front. Tjaden has more reason than most to hate Himmelstoss who gave him a torrid time because he was a bed-wetter. Himmelstoss was convinced that the bed-wetting was attributed to laziness. He forced Tjaden and another bed-wetter to sleep in the same set of bunks, and he forced them to trade places so that the one underneath would be drenched in the other's urine. Himmelstoss' treatment of the boys only made matters worse.

Four of the classmates, Paul, Kropp, Tjaden and Haie plotted their revenge on Himmelstoss. They ambushed him when he was returning from his favorite pub. They covered his head and punched him senseless. They stripped him of his pants and lashed him with a whip. They managed to slip away without Himmelstoss discovering their identities.

#### **Interpretation**

Chapters 1 and 2 dealt with the general battle scene and a character study of Paul.

In Chapter 3, we are provided with more detailed character analyses of other members of the group.

Some of these analyses we obtain from understanding what various members of the group did prior to the war. Remarque does this so as to emphasize the dehumanizing of their personalities as they survive the warfare.

Kemmerich's death is a sad event, but we really don't know much about him.

We feel slightly more involved in Joseph Behm's death because we sympathize with his reluctance to join with the other volunteers.

We will be more moved by the deaths of those that remain because we know more about them through these characterizations.

Although we view these characters as individuals with their own distinguishing features, so far as the war machine is concerned they are all identical and has the same opportunity to die. Again I emphasize that this is not an adventure with a happy ending and our hero survives to the end of the story for one reason only – because he is telling the story.

In order to justify Himmelstoss' beating, Remarque carefully explains what this sadistic Corporal was like. For example, he had his own exercise for trying to cure Tjaden's bed wetting problem. He devised a special drill called 'Change at Löhne', which was a total waste of time and was no solution at all, but merely made matters worse, and increased the misery of Tjaden and the other bed wetting soldier.

Remarque describes Paul's hero Kat, who is clearly a natural leader and provides a ray of sunshine to their dismal world. He is a cobbler by trade, an old-fashioned livelihood, but an honorable trade that reminds us of a life before the mechanized age. The kind of tradesman that Kat represents died in this conflict. There was no place in the so-called modern world of the 1920's for such as him.

Towards the end of the Chapter, we witness another illustration of the dehumanizing of the soldiers at the Front. What starts of as a prank against Himmelstoss nearly ends in murder. There is much symbolism in the names of those involved in this episode. Haie translated means shark. Himmelstoss translated means heaven strike or hit. Paul and his friends exhibit the same type of cruelty on Himmelstoss that they experienced both from the Corporal and the others in command of their company. Although the soldiers are themselves powerless, when the opportunity presents itself, they enjoy exercising power over others. Briefly, they can anonymously exercise their power over Himmelstoss. We note that Haie did the bulk of the beating of Himmelstoss, and as his name suggests, he bent over his victim "with a fiendish grin and his

mouth open with bloodlust". Further on we read, "At last Haie pulled Himmelstoss to his feet again, and gave a private performance as the final act. He drew his right arm so far back before clouting him that it looked as if he was trying to pluck stars out of the night sky. Himmelstoss went down. Haie picked him up again, lined him up and gave him a second magnificently aimed wallop with his left hand. Himmelstoss howled and fled on all fours. His striped postman's backside shone in the moonlight." Remarque cleverly describes the scene and it is easily visualized by the reader.

Much of the success of this book stems from the descriptive pen of its author.

## **CHAPTER 4**

### **Summary**

When there is a lull in the fighting, both sides take the opportunity to recover bodies, repair trenches and do various other housekeeping tasks. Paul's unit is assigned the task of laying barbed wire at the Front Line. This task has to be done on foot. As you approach the Front Line your attitude changes because your chances of being killed are increased. Paul and his colleagues complete their task of rolling out and staking the barbed wire.

Whilst being transported away from the Line in trucks, there is a sudden burst of shelling. A nearby convoy of horses is caught up in the shelling and the air is filled with their cries. Detering, the farmer, found this a particularly hard episode to experience. The horses were left to suffer whilst the wounded men were treated, but eventually they were shot. Paul and his unit continue on their way, but the artillery barrage intensifies and Paul and his group are forced to leave the trucks and seek cover in a graveyard. Soon the graveyard becomes a scene of chaos as shells exhume the coffins. The shelling makes it impossible to escape from the graveyard and Paul is forced to take refuge in a coffin beside its corpse. Finally, the bombardment ends and a specter of mayhem meet the survivors' eyes. Paul has been hit by some shrapnel splinters but is not seriously hurt. One of his companions is more seriously wounded in the stomach and hip and he will not survive long the way he is losing blood. With no chance of rescue, Kat and Paul decide on a mercy killing, for the young recruit will be in agony when the shock wears off. Before they are able to carry out this deed, the rest of the survivors gather round condemning the young man to a painful death.

### **Interpretation**

Chapter 4 is the start of an important set of Chapters from 4 through to 6.

Here Remarque takes us through a more detailed description of the horrors arising from an artillery bombardment. We read, "The earth explodes in front of us. Great clumps of it come raining down on top of us. I feel a jolt. My sleeve has been ripped by some shrapnel. I clench my fist. No pain. But that is no comfort; wounds never start to hurt until afterwards. .... A piece of shrapnel hit my helmet, but it came from so far of that it didn't cut through the steel. I wiped the dirt out of my eyes. A hole has been blown in the ground right in front of me; I can just about make it out. Shells don't often land in the same place twice and I want to get into that hole. Without stopping I wriggle across towards it as fast as I can, flat as an eel on the ground – there is a whistling noise again, I curl up quickly and grab for some cover, feel something to my left and press against it, it gives, I groan, and the earth is torn up again, the blast thunders in my ears, I crawl under whatever it was that gave way when I touched it, pull it over me – it is wood." The wood is in fact a coffin. It is death itself that protects Paul. We can picture Paul trying to merge with the earth, desperately seeking protection from the terrible artillery onslaught.

This whole Chapter is full of imagery and there is almost a deep personal relationship with the mother earth, and Paul is the child seeking protection.

Paul observes that the soldiers turn into animals driven by their instinct to survive. A most disturbing scene involves the horses that are caught up in the bombardment. Detering finds this particularly hard to bear because, being a farmer, he is very fond of horses which at this time were essential to the farmer to get the manual work done in bringing in the crops etc. Again we observe Detering's viewpoint that horses are honorable beasts and like the humans, have been brought down to the lowest level by the war machine.

The confused life at the Front is highlighted by this graveyard scene, where even those that have died are not allowed to Rest in Peace, but are exhumed by the constant shelling. The reader can clearly see how there is no honor or glory in this war. It is a true hell on earth scenario.

So far as the Front Line soldier is concerned, performing a patriotic duty for the Fatherland is way down on the list of priorities. All the soldier cares about is surviving, trying to do his best to avoid the bullet and the shells, acquiring food, obtaining clothing even if it comes from fallen comrades, and shelter.

Remarque uses a well-established writing technique by creating a climax in this Chapter. The Chapter starts in an innocuous fashion and then he cleverly increases the pace and brings about a crescendo of violence and horror. Through his descriptive writing, all our senses are fuelled. We first imagine the sounds emitted by the shells and bullets, the moaning of the dying horses and the cries of the wounded soldiers.



We can visualize the colors of the flares and rockets, and we can almost smell the damp earth and the cordite-filled air. We can also experience the sense of suffocation and claustrophobia when the men are forced to wear their gas masks. Chapter 4 represents one of the most intense Chapters in the book. Chapter 5 provides us with a respite.

## **CHAPTER 5**

### **Summary**

Paul's company eventually returns to the huts behind the lines and they pass the time killing lice. Corporal Himmelstoss is due to arrive shortly and there is much anticipation.

The men engage in a common pastime of "What would you do if peace were declared tomorrow?" Tjaden would like to spend the rest of his life torturing Himmelstoss. Detering, of course, just wants to return to his family. Haie, surprisingly, wishes to remain in the army because it is better than digging peat. No doubt similar discussions take place behind the Allied lines. Kropp has little enthusiasm. The war has crushed all ambition in him. Paul concludes that they are all running scared. They did not have the opportunity to love life and the world. They have had their existence shot to pieces. The first bomb explosion dashed all their hopes. They are cut off from any sort of advancement or from any realistic ambitions until the war finishes. Himmelstoss appears and there is a strange role reversal. He is now a raw recruit so far as the Front Line is concerned, and Tjaden openly insults him. Himmelstoss storms off to the Company Commander, Lieutenant Bertinck, and he is conscious that discipline must be preserved, even although he sympathizes with Tjaden and Kropp, who was also insubordinate. The pair is given light sentences of Open Arrest.

The resourceful Kat manages to get his hands on a goose and Kat and Paul enjoy a square meal for a change. For a brief moment they can escape the horrors of war and enjoy the feast. Once they have had their fill, they share the rest of the goose with Kropp and Tjaden.

### **Interpretation**

Chapter 5 is the middle portion of this 3-Chapter set. It is framed on both sides by harsh Chapters that describe the full fury of trench warfare.

Remarque purposely places this mild scene between the horrors of Chapters 4 and 6. We can almost feel the warmth from the fire where the goose is roasting and we can imagine the sumptuous taste of the fowl enjoyed by Kat, Paul and the others. Remarque's purpose, of course, is to provide maximum emotional effect on the reader when engulfed by the full fury of war.

Shakespeare was adept at providing contrasts like this, and it mirrors what life was actually like during the First World War. Between the actual battles there was a strange peace with only the odd reconnaissance and sniper's bullet to worry about. It is almost as if both sides agree that they require a rest at the same time.

Also in this Chapter, Remarque emphasizes a theme previously introduced concerning Paul's lost generation. Those that entered this theatre of war at a young age were to suffer the most both in casualties and success in rehabilitation after the war. At a time when most young men are struggling to obtain an adult identity, these young adults were thrown into a world where they were given the same non-identity. The little they had when they arrived was taken away from them. They were forced to act on their instincts or die. The longer they survived, the harder it became for them to visualize any world outside their lives as soldiers. This is highlighted by Haie's view that after the war he will remain in the army. The only member of the group who has a definite plan for the future is Tjaden, who wishes to exact revenge on Himmelstoss. Of course the older Detering has clear plans for after the war, but he is much older and he has a chance of rehabilitation because he will presumably have his loving family to return to.

The older generation in authority does not come out of this novel with any credit. We have previously seen how the school teacher Kantorek, duped by propaganda, urged his students to enlist for the slaughter. Himmelstoss would have lived out his life as an insignificant figure, but war has promoted him to a position of importance and he has become power mad and arrogant. Of course, Himmelstoss is in for a rude awakening at the Front Line. Up until now he has been involved in training new recruits and has been guided by a clear set of rules that he has slavishly followed. These rules will not be of any use to him at the Front Line.

Faced with the common evil of war we note how Paul's close group of comrades becomes like a family. The way they interact with one another and form social bonds would not have been possible in the peacetime world. This type of closeness between men is perhaps the only good aspect to come out of this war situation. The way Remarque describes these relationships is the only romantic feature in the entire novel.

## **CHAPTER 6**

### **Summary**

We return to the trenches and the War is coming to a critical stage, and both sides realize this. Both warring factions are desperate to break the stalemate.

Before an offensive takes place, a prolonged artillery bombardment is used in order to weaken the enemy's defenses. Sometimes the bombardment will last for days and the soldiers are forced to hide in their bunkers and hope that they do not suffer a direct hit. These bombardments had limited effect because there were always sufficient survivors to significantly diminish the attacking force with machine guns and grenades. What the bombardment did accomplish was to damage the trenches themselves, but there were normally at least two parallel sets of trenches, and usually the second line did not sustain the same amount of damage as the first line. So, when one side attacked, the other would retreat to the better defended line. The attacking force would take control of the damaged first line of trenches, but when the other side changed defense into attack, they found they were unable to defend the enemy's first line, and they would retreat to their own trenches. Finally, both sides would return to their original positions.

On this particular day, Paul's unit went up to the Front Line passing a shelled schoolhouse where there was a double wall of new coffins waiting. The soldiers realized that these coffins were for them. Paul describes the situation during the bombardment as being like a cage where you are trapped wondering what will happen. It was purely a matter of chance whether you survived the bombardment or not. Although they were not actually told that there was going to be an offensive, veterans like Paul knew the pattern of events by now. They would receive extra rations only because these came up with the increased supplies of ammunition. Before the offensive, the heavy bombardment increased significantly. They would also receive a tot of alcohol, and sometimes some cheese.

This particular barrage seemed to go on day after day after day, and many of the new recruits cracked under the constant pressure. At one stage several of the recruits struggled to escape the bunkers and Paul and Kat had their hands full trying to restrain them. However, one did get past, and ran out into the trench only to be disintegrated into pieces of flesh and uniform. They had to tie up another recruit. At last the attack came, and Paul and his comrades spewed out from the dugout throwing a hail of grenades. On this day they would be fighting the French. Paul and his unit quickly set up their machine guns and mowed down the French attackers, all of them killed in a manic frenzy after spending days cooped up in their bunker.

Seeing the French in disarray, Paul and his unit left their trenches and traversed no man's land and reached the enemy lines with little opposition. Killing the few French that were left, they searched the French trenches for provisions and gathered up what they could and then returned to their own lines. They noted that the French seemed to be better supplied than them.

Attack and counter-attack took place during the next few days. As the casualties built up on both sides, those that were left witnessed horrific scene after horrific scene. Soldiers were running with both feet cut off, a man next to Paul had his head blown off yet he still carried on running for a few paces more, and men still living with their skulls blown open. During one attack, Paul came across Himmelstoss hiding, pretending to be wounded. Paul struck Himmelstoss urging him to attack. It was not until a nearby Lieutenant ordered him to proceed that he got up. Finally, when Paul's company is relieved, only 32 out of the original 150 men remained.

### **Interpretation**

This is a most gruesome Chapter, and to the reader it is in stark contrast to the previous Chapter.

Remarque builds the tension by vividly describing the scenes inside the dugout during the bombardment. We read, "The recruit who had the fit earlier is raving again, and two more have joined in. One breaks away and runs for it. We have trouble holding the other two. I rush out after the one who ran away and I wonder if I should shoot him in the leg; then there is a whistling noise, I throw myself flat, and when I get up there are fragments of hot shrapnel, scraps of flesh and torn pieces of uniform splattered on the wall of the trench. I scramble back inside."

It is easy for someone to say that war is terrible – a living hell, but in order to truly appreciate this sentiment, it needs to be backed up. Remarque does this. Having experienced war at first hand; he is able to provide us with a vivid insight into this wholesale slaughter. The futility of this engagement is that nothing is achieved – no territory is won – both sides are equally weakened. We are aware that even death for many is not clean.

Even the way in which soldiers kill one another has become a science. The soldiers carry a spade so that if they take the enemy trenches they will be able to repair them quickly, but the soldiers have also realized that the spade is a better weapon than the bayonet, so they have sharpened the spade in order to make it even more lethal. The problem with the bayonet is that it can sometimes get stuck or break off in your

enemy, and while you are trying to remove the bayonet, you are making yourself a better target. The spade will not get stuck in your opponent and once you have killed your enemy you can crouch down and blend in better with the landscape.

We sense that Paul and the other veterans have little time for the new recruits. Their panicking only affects the moral of the other soldiers and the fact that they are coming in ever increasing numbers indicates to the war-hardened soldiers that German is losing the war, and is reaching the bottom of her manpower resources.

We read, "We have turned into dangerous animals. We are not fighting; we are defending ourselves from annihilation. We are not hurling our grenades against human beings – what do we know about all that in the heat of the moment? – the hands and the helmets that are after us belong to death himself, and for the first time in three days we are able to look death in the eyes, for the first time in three days we can defend ourselves against it, we are maddened with fury, not lying there waiting impotently for the executioner any more, we can destroy and we can kill to save ourselves, to save ourselves and to take revenge."

Perhaps the generals realized that the effects of artillery bombardments were two-fold – not just to weaken the defenses of the enemy, but to turn the troops into frenzied killing machines. The generals realized that both sides engage in the bombardments, so if you can protect more of your own troops than the opposition, then you will have a better killing machine when the offensive starts.

We note Paul's observation that if his father came charging at him from the French lines, he would throw a grenade at him just the same.

## **CHAPTER 7**

### **Summary**

Paul's company gets some respite from the Front and they are sent to a depot that requires reorganization. Himmelstoss makes great efforts to befriend the men after experiencing the horrors of battle. He provides them with easy jobs to carry out and even wins Tjaden over, mainly due to the generous supply of food that he makes available.

Paul, Leer and Kropp go swimming in the nearby canal and they notice three French women on the other side. They arrange to meet with the women later that night using food in order to persuade them. Despite their limited knowledge of French, they are soon able to engage in conversation with these women. Paul's only knowledge of sex has come from the army brothels where little affection is obtained. He hopes this liaison with these women will be more romantic, and that he will be able to regain some of his youth and innocence.

Paul receives seventeen days of leave and he travels home on the train to his home town. He has also learned that he will not return to the Front until he has carried out additional training, which will last six weeks. He ponders how many of his friends will still remain when he eventually gets back to the Front. Surprisingly, one of the French women with whom he has struck up a friendship loses interest in him when she realizes that he is going on leave, and not back to the Front. He arrives home to find that his mother is quite ill with cancer, and that the civilian population is suffering too due to the lack of food. Paul is bombarded with questions about life at the Front, but he avoids these and in fact lies to his mother because no-one can understand what the Front Line is like unless they actually experience it.

Whilst in the town, Paul fails to salute a Major who reprimands him by making him march up and down the street, saluting him smartly. Paul decides to wear civilian clothing for the remainder of his leave. Paul's father is particularly interested in hearing about his experiences, not appreciating how traumatic it is to put his experiences into words.

Paul has changed. He is more nervous and starts when he hears the screeching of the trams as it resembles the whistling of the shells. He cannot settle into this domestic lifestyle.

Mittelstaedt, one of Paul's classmates that stayed behind, is now a training officer and he tells Paul that their teacher Kantorek has been conscripted. Paul's friend delighted in ordering Kantorek about whilst he was training. The two students recall how Kantorek had coerced Joseph Behn into volunteering, and although he would have been called up within three months, he may have lived three months longer.

As Paul's leave draws to a close, his mother becomes more depressed at their parting. On his last night Paul notices that she is in severe pain and he urges her to rest in bed. Deep down he longs to unburden himself to his mother and let all his emotions break free and die with her in her lap. We read, "I bury my head in my pillow, I clench my fists round the iron uprights on my bedstead. I should never have come home. Out there I was indifferent and a lot of the time I was completely without hope – I can never be like that again. I was a soldier, and now it is all suffering, for me, for my mother, for everything, because it is also hopeless and never ending."

### **Interpretation**

Paul's unit is taken from the Front Line because they have ceased to become a fighting unit due to the great losses they have suffered. Once their complement has been refurbished, they will again be sent into battle. We observe that Himmelstoss now appreciates the terrors on the Front Line and wishes to appease himself with the men. He has lost the arrogant and sadistic features of his nature, and suddenly he feels vulnerable because he has lost the power that he wielded over the men. Like the rest, his life hangs by a thread. We suspect that Kantorek will also undergo a similar transition, but there are still plenty other members of society who are pompous and power-hungry, illustrated by Paul's encounter with the Major in his home town.

After exposing the reader to the horrors in Chapters 4 and 6, Remarque brings us away from the Front Line with Paul. Firstly, we are brought to the depot and we share Paul's almost schoolboy prank in swimming in the canal and liaising with three French women who are technically their enemies. Paul views the women as a means to regain some of his innocence and youth, for he has only known the women from the army brothels. He wishes to relive his youth and engage in a romantic relationship with the French girls. However, this is not reciprocated. Initially the girls only agree to meet the German soldiers because they will provide them with food. There is also an element of excitement for the girls in fraternizing with these soldiers who might be killed the next day at the Front. So, when Paul reveals that he is going on leave, the excitement evaporates, and the young girl with whom Paul has become friendly loses interest.

When Paul takes his leave, the reader is physically taken far away from the Front Line and the shelling and fighting. This is symbolized by the description of the train journey. When he arrives home, he feels like a stranger unable to settle into his home life. The way he felt before volunteering for duty is now just a vague memory. In order to survive when he returns to the Front, he knows he has to maintain his indifference and not let his emotions control his thinking. The feelings and bonds he had for his family and friends, and in fact anybody, were shattered during his initial days at the Front Line. If these relationships and feelings were to be rebuilt, it would make life at the Front impossible. What he really needs is to be left in peace to recuperate, but those around him continually bombard him with pointed questions. In the end he is forced to lie to his mother. He repeats this lying when he visits Kemmerich's mother saying that her son died quickly and without pain. Another reason why Paul does not reveal the full horrors of the battlefield is that people may not believe that he is providing a true picture. They may think that he is exaggerating the situation and such a tone might be misconstrued as unpatriotic. In their own way, the people back home are suffering as well, almost starving, and his mother is clearly very ill with cancer. We sense that Paul is on the verge of a breakdown. He has to steel himself to keep control, both when he visits Kemmerich's mother, and then during his final conversation with his own mother.

At the end of the Chapter we see that he deeply regrets coming home.

## **CHAPTER 8**

### **Summary**

The military training camp that Paul has to attend is not too far from his home town, and his father and sister visit him on a Sunday.

Paul does much drilling during this time and there is a soldiers' home where he can relax when he is off duty. They have a piano here and Paul takes the opportunity to play as much as possible.

Next to the training camp is a Russian prisoner-of-war compound where the prisoners are a sorry sight, on the verge of starving to death. Those Russians that have anything of value barter with the local peasants in order to receive some morsels of food. Paul is in daily contact with these prisoners and he soon realizes that the German propaganda describing the Russians as subhuman is totally false. They seem much the same as the German soldiers, being victims of the same conflict.

Paul receives a spark of hope. Once the war is over, he decides that he will campaign against war by spreading the word about its futility.

On the last Sunday before his return to the Front, he has his last traumatic meeting with his father and sister. They tell him that mother had been admitted into hospital in order to undergo an operation. His father will have to work long hours in order to pay for the operation.

Before they leave, they give Paul some food that they have gathered together, but he gives most of this to the Russian prisoners before he leaves for the Front.

### **Interpretation**

Paul realizes that what he has been told about society, patriotism and nationalism is incorrect. He has learned first hand that war is not honorable, and now he learns that the Russians are not subhuman. They are just the same as his own countrymen. Again, such views would be regarded as unpatriotic in a wartime country, but he makes some sort of commitment to try and campaign to put these errors right. Of course,

through this book, this is exactly what Remarque is doing, which drove the Nazi authorities to expel him and burn his books.

This is a feature of Remarque's work. All his books are testimonies to truth, and although the settings and stories may change, the basic theme is always the same – truth must prevail over deceit and lies.

The similarities between the German and Russian soldiers are symbolized by the improbable 'duet' between Paul on his piano, and on the other side of the barbed wire fence, a Russian playing his violin. We read, "When he hears that I play the piano a little, he fetches his violin and plays. The others sit down and lean their backs against the wire netting. He stands and plays, and often he has that far-away look that violinists get when they close their eyes, and then he strikes up a new rhythm on the instrument and smiles at me."

## **CHAPTER 9**

### **Summary**

Back at the Front, Paul is reunited with Kat, Muller, Tjaden and Kropp, who have remained uninjured. He shares what is left of the rations his mother made with them.

They are to be inspected by the Kaiser (Emperor), and everything has been prepared for his visit. They have been given new uniforms. His visit fails to inspire them and they regard him as rather an innocuous man. When he goes their new uniforms are taken back. The men conclude that the Kaiser and probably around thirty other men in the world are responsible for the war in which millions are involved and have died. If these men had said 'No' in the first place, then none of this horror would have happened. Perhaps these leaders just want to be in the history books.

Someone is required to crawl out into no man's land and assess the enemy's strength, so Paul volunteers. As he has been away from the Front he is unfamiliar with the ever-changing landscape. He becomes disorientated and finds himself lost. A bombardment begins, which is usually a prelude to an attack, so he takes refuge in a shell-hole and will play dead to avoid detection. He is soon joined by a French soldier, and Paul quickly stabs him. It is still not safe for Paul to return to his lines, so he is forced to stay in the shell-hole with the Frenchman. However, the French soldier is not dead and Paul regrets his initial instinctive reaction. It is some hours before the Frenchman eventually dies from his wound and Paul takes this badly. It is the first occasion on which he has actually killed somebody face-to-face in combat. Paul looks through the dead soldier's effects and finds that he is called Gerard Duval. He is married and has a young daughter. Paul is filled with remorse and guilt. He resolves to send money to Duval's family anonymously. At last darkness falls and Paul is able to return safely to his lines.

He confides in his comrades regarding his experience, stressing that they have often picked off enemy soldiers when they are at a distance, but to kill someone up close like this is totally different.

### **Interpretation**

We now witness another aspect of this type of warfare. The killing is mainly done from a distance.

Here Paul has the rare experience of killing someone in hand-to-hand combat. He clearly caught the Frenchman on the hop, who was not expecting the shell-hole to be occupied. The detached Paul instinctively stabbed the Frenchman. Only after he had committed the act did he consider the action he had taken. Forced to share the shell-hole with the Frenchman, a tenuous bond was created, which brought home the true realization that he had murdered this man due to the conditioning that he had undergone at the hands of the war machine.

One can ask why Paul volunteered for this dangerous mission. Was he being conscientious? Did he wish to flirt with death and tempt the fates? Was he offering himself up for sacrifice, saving one of his comrades? Who knows? Remarque wishes us to witness the face-to-face confrontation between Paul, the German, and Gerard, the Frenchman.

Remarque is commenting that this type of war is dehumanizing. It is an anonymous war, conducted at a distance.

Prior to this episode, Paul did not fully understand the consequences of his actions. Those that he had killed previously were featureless, were totally anonymous, but now Paul has killed Gerard Duval, a printer, a married man with a daughter. For the first time Paul realizes the price of taking another human life.

In the space of two Chapters we have read that Russian soldiers are individuals, and so now are the French. Remarque forces us to view this 'murder' with eyes wide open, and note that Gerard's widow and child are also victims of this act which was carried out in the name of patriotism.

You will note towards the end of this Chapter that Paul already returns to his former detached self. If he dwells on the grief of killing Duval, it will lead to his own breakdown and death.

## **CHAPTER 10**



### **Summary**

Paul's unit is given a guard detail over a supply dump located in an abandoned village. There is a concrete dugout there and they take the opportunity to get as much rest and food as possible. The scrounger around the village and find a large mahogany bed with a mattress and they move this into their dugout so that they can enjoy this luxury.

When they find two pigs they are able to prepare a feast. Paul makes some pancakes, but the smoke from their fire attracts the attention of enemy artillery and suddenly the area receives an intensive bombardment. The men gather up their food and rush for the dugout, but Paul will not take refuge until he has finished cooking his pancakes. He manages to escape the bombardment and save all the pancakes, and the men start a long period of feasting. With coffee and cognac, and a stray cat that becomes a pet, it is almost like being at home.

Unfortunately, the richness of the food brings on bouts of diarrhea. The men enjoy this life for three weeks before they are moved to another village that is to be evacuated. They take the furniture and the cat with them.

During this evacuation Kropp and Paul are wounded by a falling shell and they are taken to a nearby Hospital. Kropp has been wounded very close to his knee and he is fearful that his leg will need to be amputated. Kropp soon develops a fever and his leg is in fact amputated. Paul discovers that the Hospital is a good place to learn more about the horrors of war.

One of the patients, a soldier in his 40's called Lewandowski, is excited that his wife is coming to visit him. He has not seen her for two years, or the child that she has borne. He is keen to have somewhere private in order to be alone with his wife, but this would not be allowed by the nuns in this Catholic hospital. However, some of the other men rally round and provide a diversion by playing with Lewandowski's child, guarding the door and playing cards while the couple make love on the soldier's bed. Afterwards, they all share the food that Lewandowski's wife has brought.

Kropp recovers from his amputation, but he is now understandably depressed. Paul too has recovered from his wounds, and he is given leave to go home to recuperate. He finds his mother much weaker and it is even more difficult to part from her when it is time to return to the Front.

### **Interpretation**

This Chapter perhaps provides one of the lighter episodes in the book, and we enjoy the soldiers' preparation for their feast, although they have to scurry to their bunker when there is an artillery bombardment.

Paul's decision to remain exposed until his pancakes are finished indicates his philosophical attitude to the war. He considers that if it is his turn to die, then he will be hit by a shell. What is more important to him is eating these delicious pancakes. He might well die tomorrow and never have tasted them. This attitude is shared by the other soldiers who take pains to protect their food while they head for cover. They are all prepared to risk death provided that they are able to enjoy this meal.

When Paul arrives at the Catholic Hospital to have his wounds attended to, his boyish modesty shines through the hard coarse exterior of this veteran soldier. He is conscious of his own grimy appearance and does not wish to soil the clean sheets on his bunk in the Hospital. Remarque is commenting on the fact that despite all the rigors of the battlefield, Paul's innocence has not been completely destroyed. He still wishes to retain some modesty in this strange setting. We note how the patients use their cunning and survival techniques in order to circumvent the authority of the nuns in the Hospital. The patients know that they can get up to mischief when the nuns are at prayer.

We note how the soldiers cling on to the vestiges of normal human behavior, demonstrated by Lewandowski's anticipation of his wife's visit. He wishes to connect with the real world again and this can be obtained by being intimate with his wife. The other soldiers in the ward collaborate in order for Lewandowski's dream to come true, and they will also share in the elation that Lewandowski will experience, for they too will gain a tenuous link with reality.

The turnover of soldiers in the Hospital is quite alarming, and the staff has an efficient system for dealing with the various types of injuries that they tend. Those soldiers that won't survive go to the 'dying room'. The other patients are sorted according to their type of injury. We read, "On the floor below us there are men with stomach and spinal wounds, men with head wounds and men with both legs and arms amputated. In the right-hand wing are men with wounds in the jaw, men who have been gassed and men wounded in the nose, ears or throat. In the left-hand wing are those who have been blinded and men who have been hit in the lungs or in the pelvis, in one of the joints, in the kidneys, in the testicles or in the stomach. It is only here that you realize all the different places where a man can be hit."

Through Paul's narration, Remarque tells us that everyone who studies warfare should visit a Hospital where much can be learnt. After Paul's tour of the Hospital he is left in the quandary of how our society can allow

these butcher shops to exist when mankind has a history of over 1,000 years of civilization. How can there be any future for mankind when all his knowledge is used to reduce everything in terms of death? Remarque gives us the feeling that he did not have much time for the doctors in the Hospitals during the First World War. He infers that they were too keen to amputate limbs because this was easier than trying to save limbs; the latter alternative requires much more intensive care. With amputation, one way or another, the problem will be solved quickly.

## **CHAPTER 11**

### **Summary**

Paul and his diminishing band of comrades notice the signs all around that Germany is losing the War. They liken the War to a deadly disease that will slowly engulf them all.

Despite the messages given to them from their Commanding Officers, the soldiers know that time is running out for Germany. The replacements that they receive for the dead men are fewer and younger, and now include the maimed from the Hospitals who have not fully recovered. Their equipment is falling apart and their own worn out artillery is killing more and more of their own troops due to misfires. They have become mindless animals in constant fear of death, and this continuous pressure is now making itself felt on the troops.

Detering sees a tree in bloom and takes one of the branches to remind him of his own orchard back at home. A few days later, he deserts, but instead of fleeing to Holland, he tries to head back home and is captured and tried as a deserter. He is not seen again.

Muller receives a fatal wound in the stomach and dies a long painful death.

Paul inherits Muller's boots that had previously belonged to Kemmerich.

To make matters worse, many of the troops are now struck down with dysentery. It is only a matter of time before the Germans capitulate and now the biggest fear amongst the men is that they will be killed before the Armistice is signed.

The food supplies have become almost non-existent which forces Kat to increase his scavenging patrols. On one of these he is wounded and is bleeding profusely. Paul decides to carry Kat to the dressing station because he does not have the time to find a stretcher. Whilst carrying Kat to the station Kat is hit in the head by a piece of shrapnel. Paul's closest friend is dead.

### **Interpretation**

We observe that just as peace is on the horizon, Paul's close band of soldiers is being systematically killed by the war machine. We know that our narrator meets his end at the end of the next Chapter and this bitter irony hangs over this story like a black cloud. The war machine is fast wearing out its last components. Presumably Detering's reward for the years of service he has rendered will be a firing squad.

Again Remarque reinforces his view that there is no honor at all in this War. It is a rampant disease, infecting and killing the mankind of all those countries involved in the conflict. Those that have survived the psychological effects of the War have done so by blocking out their humanity, but now as the War approaches its end, they are unable to remain dispassionate. The disease not only affects their bodies, but also their minds. They now have no hope, and all that they can look forward to is a quick death, not a slow lingering one.

We note that those taken to the Hospital with wounds to their limbs dread the thought of amputation. They would rather be dead than continue life as only half a man.

In all of this confusion there seems to be nobody exercising common sense and humanity. The leaders and generals regard their fighting soldiers are merely flags on a map. The German High Command must now realize that their situation is hopeless, especially with the introduction of the fresh American troops into the conflict. What they now seem to be trying to avoid is losing badly. They realize that they must lose, but if they can lose slowly, they might be able to sue for an honorable peace. They are oblivious to the suffering of their soldiers in the trenches and in the Hospitals.

The systematic deaths of Paul's colleagues are traumatic for the reader, and we are saddened by their loss, but we also feel pity for Paul and the survivors, because the bonds of comradeship are slowly being dissolved. For a while, their group seemed to live charmed lives - Kat, Muller, Tjaden, Kropp, Detering and Paul. We note that Remarque states that this is a specific type of relationship between these men and it grows out of the fact that they are all sentenced to death.

So far as the generals are concerned, Paul and his friends have no individuality, no distinguishing features, they are all identical. They are all cogs in the war machine carrying out the same job. Should one of these cogs wear out, it will be replaced by another.

Detering's assumed death as a traitor provides us with a different ironic slant. He deserts because he is homesick for his farm and his land, and this was the reason why he has fought so long and hard at the Front in order to defend his Fatherland.

## **CHAPTER 12**

### **Summary**

The summer of 1918 was the bloodiest period of Paul's wartime experience.

All the other classmates who volunteered with him have been killed. There are rumors that there might be a revolt by the German people who, in many areas, are starving. The only way the German soldiers now get respite from the fighting is if they are injured. Paul is taken ill after inhaling poison gas. He is given fourteen days leave to recuperate and wonders whether he should return home, but he decides against this because he would not know what to do with himself. He wonders if anyone of his generation will survive the war, and if they do return home, they will be pale shadows of their former selves. So far as Paul is concerned, he knows that he has been permanently scarred by his experiences and doesn't know how he would be able to pull the threads together and form a meaningful existence.

Paul returns to the Front where he is killed on what was a very peaceful day by normal standards. The army report only warrants one phrase, "All quiet on the Western Front."

"He had sunk forwards and was lying on the ground as if asleep. When they turned him over, you could see that he could not have suffered long – his face wore an expression that was so composed that it looked as if he were almost happy that it had turned out that way."

### **Interpretation**

The savage irony of the novel comes to its conclusion with the death of Paul.

He and his friends had survived almost three years of trench warfare, only to die on the threshold of the Armistice, which would take place in November 1918, with Paul, the last of the group dying in the October. In Paul's home town, like towns and cities throughout Europe, they had lost a whole generation of young men.

We are conscious that Paul is Remarque's mouthpiece for the entire novel except the last two paragraphs. We are provided with a first person narrative, which is an ideal vehicle for this type of novel. We appreciate that some of the observations and ideologies provided by Paul would not have realistically come from the mind of a nineteen-year-old schoolboy, but this does not detract from the message that Remarque is making.

The last two paragraphs of the book are provided by an unnamed narrator and the narration shifts from the first person. The tense also changes, which gives the ending a timeless feel. We are not given details about Paul's death; the narrator simply tells us that he fell. Having traveled with Paul throughout his experiences we conclude that the ending is what Paul wished, symbolized by his peaceful expression. Paul is blessed with a dignified death, unlike many of his comrades. We now fully appreciate the ironic title to this book, as we understand its context.

We note that Paul's death has absolutely no effect on the situation. His single loss will go unnoticed by the war machine. Paul's sacrifice was for nothing. The reasons he volunteered for service – nationalism and patriotism – disappeared after a few days of conflict.

Remarque's novel is a testimony to Paul's and all the other sacrifices, and the further irony is that this was the War to end all Wars, but despite all the carnage that was suffered, humanity failed to learn the lessons of this conflict, and particularly in Germany the war drums were beating again within fifteen years of the end of World War I.

## **CONCLUSION**

At the end of the novel, we feel a sense of anti-climax with the death of Paul, but in a way we are provided with an alternative ending for Paul. In a sense he is resurrected in Remarque's novel, "The Road Back", so if you want to have inkling as to the type of life Paul would have had if he had survived, you should read this work.

"All Quiet on the Western Front" is a mix of documentary and memories Remarque had of his own experiences at the Front Line. There are no heroics. There is no strong political message. This is not an adventure. There are no clear winners – only death and the war itself. It is merely an honest account of what life was really like at the Front Line. Although there were desertions, there was no wide scale revolt

despite the conditions. The only incident we have of desertion was through Detering. But he was homesick.

Remarque carefully captures the comradeship between Paul and the other soldiers in his unit, but you will note that Remarque makes it clear that these bonds crumble when the threat of death and war is removed.

Looking back over these Chapters there are many memorable scenes, but I would draw your attention to the scene where Paul and his colleagues come under fire in the military cemetery. This provides grotesque gothic imagery, Remarque making the comment that the dead don't stay buried for long. The only really adventurous scene is when the group comes under fire whilst cooking their meal. The challenge is to save their food and save them, and they are successful.

Perhaps the most moving scene involves the convoy of horses. You will recall that Paul was moving to the Front Line to lay barbed wire. They encountered a column of men and horses. We read, "The backs of the horses shine in the moonlight and their movements are good to see – they toss their heads and their eyes flash. The guns and the wagons glide past against an indistinct background like a lunar landscape, while the steel helmeted cavalymen look like knights in amour from a bygone age – somehow it is moving and beautiful." Soon after, this beautiful scene is torn apart by a fierce bombardment. The same horses lay wounded and dying, giving up and unearthly cry. Paul makes the comment that the sound of dying horses is like the "moaning of the world ... a martyred creation full of terror and groaning."

Arguably, this book has a greater effect on its reader than any other novel on this subject.

## **THEMES**

### **FUTILITY OF WAR**

It took Remarque quite a long period of time before recounting his experiences in the Great War. He was concerned that Europe would fall into the abyss again, and so he decided to provide an honest overview of what actually happened in the trenches on both sides during the conflict.

The clear message is that there was no glory or honor in this war. The reasons that men gave for enlisting were nationalism and patriotism, which were soon shown to be false and hollow. Remarque blames this conflict on perhaps not more than thirty individuals who used up a whole generation of young men in pursuing their own selfish desires.

The millions of victims arising out of this conflict were lucky if they had a quick and clean death. However, many went through a process of degeneration and dehumanizing before they met their death, and those that survived were never whole again, being both physically and mentally scarred.

To emphasize Remarque's main themes, he makes important statements, usually at the end of each of the 12 Chapters. Here are a few examples:

In Chapter 1, we have the incident with Kemmerich's boots. These he had obtained from an airman, and now that he has only one leg, he will not require them and when he dies, they are passed on to Muller. When Muller dies, the boots pass on to Paul, and presumably the boots see out the rest of the war on someone else's feet. From this we learn that 'things' are more important than people.

In Chapter 3, Remarque is concerned with the dehumanizing of the soldiers and the effects that power has over them. Paul's class mates take their revenge on Himmelstoss and nearly murder the sadistic Corporal.

In Chapter 6, we get an insight into the scale of losses suffered. We learn that only 32 of the original 150 in Paul's company remain after a prolonged period of fighting.

In Chapters 7 and 8, we note the effects that the War has on the home front where Paul has difficulty in picking up the pieces of his home life. He cannot share his experiences with his loved ones because they would not understand.

### **CHARACTERISATION OF PAUL BÄUMER**

As we have said before, Paul is Remarque's mouthpiece in "All Quiet on the Western Front". He is the novel's narrator and protagonist, and to understand Paul, is to understand Remarque and his views concerning the Great War and wars in general.

We are provided with details concerning Paul's group before they became soldiers, and although they come from different backgrounds, they are slowly molded into the same type of despairing soldier.

Paul quickly learns that in order to preserve his sanity, he has to disconnect his mind from his feelings. To maintain sharpness, he must keep his emotions subdued.

Remarque is clear in applying Paul's experience to millions of others on both sides of no man's land. He tells us that the frustration shared by the men stems from the fact that no progress is made and that

because of their actions, they are indirectly destroying their world back home, which they initially volunteered to protect. When Paul goes back to his home town he has to lie to his family because they would be unable to accept the truth. After all, collectively they had urged Paul and his contemporaries to volunteer for this honorable cause. Both sides had entered into the conflict under the misapprehension that the battle would be over within months.

Nowadays we know that a problem shared is a problem halved, but Paul and the other soldiers have nobody with whom they can share the experience. When the book was published, Remarque in a way was sharing his experiences with the general public, and it was widely acclaimed and accepted, but in the eyes of the authorities, i.e. the Nazi regime, Remarque's views were in complete contradiction to their warlike aims, and the book was declared as defeatist and unpatriotic, and was burned.

We witness Paul's death and note that he is glad that his ordeal has come to an end. He has a look of contentment and calm on his face. We note that Paul feels that his continual survival is a curse, and the longer he lives and endures the less likely he will be able to lead a full and meaningful life back home.

### **QUESTIONS**

- Q. The way the Chapters and scenes are constructed throughout the novel is deliberate. The aim is to emphasize Remarque's ideas more forcibly. Give examples of these contrasting scenes.
- Q. Why was Paul's killing of Duval so disturbing to our narrator?
- Q. What was Remarque trying to achieve by providing the book with a Preface?