

# All quiet on the western front - the generation that was destroyed by the war

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This book is about A young man of nineteen who served in the German army on the French front during World War I. Paul and several of his school friends volunteered to join the military after listening to their instructor Kantorek's inspiring patriotic speeches. But after 10 weeks of brutal training by the tiny, cruel Corporal Himmelstoss and the unthinkable brutality of life at the front.

Following two weeks of fighting, just eighty men from the initial 150-man company return from the front when Paul's company receives a short relief. The cook doesn't want to give the survivors the rations intended for the dead men, but eventually agrees to do so; the men enjoy a great meal. Paul and his friends are visiting Kemmerich, a former classmate who had a leg amputated recently.

The company is being strengthened by a group of new recruits, and Paul's friend Kat is producing a beef and bean stew that will impress them. Kat says wars would be over immediately if all the men in an army, including the officers, were paid the same wage and given the same food. Kropp, another of the former classmates of Paul, says there should be no armies; he suggests that the representatives of a country should be there.

Modern medicine knows more about post-traumatic stress disorder, but in Remarque's day it was uncharted water. His point of view - similar to the common soldier of any nation - provides the reader with insights concerning the shocking events that led to the alienation and displacement of his entire age-group. Remarque's words brought swift reactions in postwar Germany and positive responses from critics.

Although the German government – particularly the Third Reich – banned Remarque’s book and often burned it because it dared to criticize the government and militarism, Western critics were largely positive about his novel. Their pre-World War II words – a time when military leaders optimistically predicted the end of international aggression – addressed the poignancy of the First World War.

Notwithstanding the words of Remarque and the millions of readers who have read his novel over the years, the modern era has seen great cataclysms redefining the war’s inhumanity with technological innovations that the generation of Remarque could never have imagined. The Second World War, the Korean War, Vietnam, the Seven-Day War in Israel, Russia’s assault on Afghanistan, the Persian Gulf War.

As the German army begins to give in to the unrelenting pressure of the Allied forces, Paul’s friends are killed in combat one by one. Detering, one of Paul’s close friends, attempts to desert but is caught and court-martialed. Kat is killed when a piece of shrapnel slices his head open while Paul is carrying him to safety. By the fall of 1918, Paul is the only one of his circle of friends who is still alive. Soldiers everywhere whisper that the Germans will soon surrender and that peace will come. Paul is poisoned in a gas attack and given a short leave. He reflects that, when the war ends, he will be ruined for peacetime; all he knows is the war. In October 1918, on a day with very little fighting, Paul is killed. The army report for that day reads simply: “All quiet on the Western Front.” Paul’s corpse wears a calm expression, as though relieved that the end has come at last.

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