

All quiet on western front movie review

[Literature](#), [Russian Literature](#)



All Quiet on the Western Front is a movie based on the book of the same name by Erich Maria Remarque published in 1929. There were two versions of the movie. The first version was released in 1930, quickly after the book was published, and was directed by Lewis Milestone. The second version was made in 1979 and directed by Delbert Mann. This version was rated R for the violence in the battle scenes. There was no rating system in 1930. The book and both movies are considered fine examples of anti-war sentiments. Until Saving Private Ryan released in 1998, this film was considered the most realistic in its portrayal of the horrors, gore, violence and trauma that actually takes place in war.

The movie is narrated by Paul Bäumer and follows the lives of Bäumer and nineteen of his classmates in Germany. Each of the main characters is brought to life through flashbacks of their youth and what each loved. Their love of law, theology, art, poetry, farming, science and even peat digging distinguish one from the other. The boys' professor pushes them to serve the Fatherland as it embarks upon a great war. Upon graduation, all are drafted into the Army. These fun-loving, care-free young men are enthusiastic and willing participants. We see them nattily dressed and singing while marching into the military training center. Remarque's words that open the film spell their fate in stark terms: " A generation of men who, even those who escaped its shells, were destroyed by the war."

All of these boys are brought to task when their training begins. It becomes especially daunting when the postman they taunted in their town is the corporal who trains them. Corporal Himmelstoss is a sadistic trainer, who gets even for all the tricks the boys played on him back home. Despite this,

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the camaraderie of the boys carries through, and they are sent off to the Western Front where Germany and France are at war.

They are met by Kat, a wizened and experienced soldier who will lead their platoon. He tells them to forget everything they learned in training. This is a trench war where artillery is the main killer. He tells them they have seconds to make a decision to hit the ground and perhaps save their lives. After each shelling, the men rise from the trenches for hand-to-hand combat.

Disillusionment sets in fast. New menaces appear in the form of flames throwers and poison gas. The battle scenes are raw and violent. The battlefields are littered with bodies; it's a bloody, muddy terrain. They are hungry, thirsty, poorly clothed, sleep deprived and in poor physical shape as the movie progresses. When the boys wonder what they are fighting for, Kat tells them: " The only reason we're fighting this war is it's useful to somebody".

In one scene, Bäumer stabs a French soldier who falls into his foxhole. Although alleged enemies, Bäumer tends to the soldier's wounds. He realizes that, except for the uniforms, they would be brothers. He muses that " they" don't want them to know they're the same; they have mothers; they are afraid of pain and dying. He asks forgiveness from the soldier as he dies.

A number of the boys are either wounded or killed as the movie progresses from scene to scene. Paul Bäumer is wounded and hospitalized and is given leave to go home once he recovers. He doesn't recognize his once beautiful village. It is lacking in food; its citizens disillusioned and only women and old men occupy it. All the young men and fathers have been drafted. While

home, Paul sits in his room, rifling through his old drawings. He writes a letter to his mother as he's leaving: " Mother, I am no longer what I was when I lived in this room. I am a soldier. My business is not reading; it is killing...I know now I should never have come back...Out there all men think as I do. There is no argument about the meaning of life because it has no meaning..." He tears up the letter and returns to the front. He has lost nearly everyone from his class. Thirteen are dead, four are missing and one is in the madhouse. In his last act of heroism, he attempts to save Kat who dies while being carried by Bäumer to the hospital. In the end, Paul Bäumer is also shot dead just a communique dated October 11, 1918 is received stating: " All Quiet on the Western Front."

This movie mirrors what was happening at home in Germany. When it was first apparent that Germany was going to war with Russia and France, there was great support for the effort. The August Days, as they were called, were rife with enthusiasm for this war. According to Fritzsche, " What the kaiser called the Burgfrieden, the ' peace of the fortress' promised to solve the divisions between workers and the middle classes...". This promise extended to the disparities between Catholics and Protestants as well as socialists and conservatives. There was a sense of community and a false sense that it would be a quick and easy war similar to the Franco-Prussian conflict. Like the young recruits singing as they marched to training camp, the Germans whistled their way to WWI. However, the reality of war fairly quickly eroded the Germans' enthusiasm. By the end of June 1914, there was either a lack of food or inflated prices, which continued to grow while wages were stagnant even with the war machine creating jobs. Women were displaced

from home and forced into working. Coal, their main source of heat, was scarce and expensive if found. The villages were full of very young boys, old men and women. Every other male had been conscripted into the Army. Disillusionment was complete.

Just as the soldiers wanted for food, so did the German citizens. “ It was no surprise, then, that in the summer of 1915 Hamburg’s private charities and municipal offices operated 58 soup kitchens serving 30, 000 portions every day”. Rationing was introduced. By the winter of 1916-17, there were “ little more than turnips to eat”. As Bäumer and his classmates felt betrayed by their professors and their superiors in the military, the Germans left at home felt the same betrayal. Promised a quick war with glorious success, both the military and the civilians found that an empty covenant. The riches brought on by rapid industrialization; the lessening of disparity between workers and employers; the pride and nationalism growing before the war...all were casualties of WWI.

Bäumer’s story was one of death and dying with no apparent positive dividend. Fritzsche’s view, on the other hand, was that some positive effects rose from the ashes of all that death and deprivation. “ The German people had gotten a glimpse of themselves as a national compact that existed independently of the monarch and rested on the achievements of ordinary citizens and soldiers’. In this way, Fritzsche believed that the Germans had gained self-reliance and public spiritedness and would fashion their own “ cohesive Germany”.