

Some strange and
melancholy way



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

“ We know only that in some strange and melancholy way we have become a wasteland.” It is common knowledge that war is physically destructive and treacherous. It is common knowledge that soldiers all around the world perish daily. In Erich Maria Remarque’s novel, *All Quiet on the Western Front*, a new aspect of war is introduced.

What lies after combat, death, and loss is most tragic of all; life after the war. This historic war novel takes place during The Great War, World War I. German Soldier, Paul Bäumer, narrates from his standpoint as he enters the war as an eager eighteen-year-old.

Throughout the story, he experiences a profound bond with his comrades, a bond broken only by death itself. Although Paul does not live to return home to his family, read his books again, nor pursue his dreams prior to the war, he has already been desecrated by the image of fallen friends and even enemies. Surviving the terrors of war does not set soldiers free, but makes them as unlucky as their fallen brothers. Shockingly, one of the most unsettling worries for the young soldiers was returning home after the war. Paul, along with his comrades, was rushed into combat at an early stage in his life.

When comparing his life to older soldiers, Paul expresses, “...for the generation that grew up before us, though it has passed these years with us here, already had a home and a calling; now it can return to its old occupations, and the war will be forgotten” (294). Due to the men joining the army right after they finished high school, they did not have time, nor the opportunity to begin life outside of education, as the older generation did.

Instead of starting a family, continuing school, or finding a steady job, the men are rushed off into combat.

Without a previous life before the war, the men notably have nothing to look forward to. The war becomes their life, the only life they have ever known. Therefore, when they return from the fiery of the fronts, they find themselves more alone than ever before. Another way war destroys minds is through the death of a fellow comrade. The everlasting bond between soldiers is described best by Paul when he declares, " They are more to me than life, these voices, they are more than motherliness and more than fear; they are the strongest, most comforting thing there is anywhere: they are the voices of my comrades" (212).

Death can tear people apart; death can also bring people closer. In *All Quiet on the Western Front*, the soldiers, despite the suffering and loss, develop an unbreakable bond. Whether it is the brutal training with Corporal Himmelstoss, a ruthless man who trains the soldiers, or the terrors of machine guns, grenades, and poison gas, the men are with each other through everything. In fact, they are all each other have. This bond can be both key to survival and keeping sanity but it can also be deadly. When a fellow comrade perishes in battle, the men lose a brother, best friend, and soldier all at once. War is not solely about surviving, it is about surviving with others. A soldier's mind, much like Paul's when he loses Kat, his best friend, is forever damaged. No medicine nor time away from war can heal a soldier's memory, no medicine nor time can heal a soldier's mind. Not only are soldiers harmed by the death of comrades, but they are also slowly

damaged by how normal death becomes. Death on the battlefield is inevitable, and in a sense, normal.

An orderly tending to Kemmerich's fatal leg amputation reports, "...today alone there have been sixteen deaths- yours is the seventeenth. There will probably be twenty altogether" (32). In the midst of war, numbers replace lives. For every life lost, a number is added to a chart. Kemmerich was a comrade and friend to Paul's squad. To the orderly, he was no more than the seventeenth death of the day. Perhaps it is easier for the men to cope with loss when death is habitual. However, it is not until after the war when each number is replaced with a life, an innocent and promising life.

Dehumanization benefits the soldiers during the war when they need to barricade loss. Unfortunately, years after the war when men need it the least, dehumanization seizes one's thoughts and holds them accountable for every life, every number, every man.

Those who consider themselves lucky for surviving war are truly fortunate. Not all soldiers have the belief to say surviving was lucky. Men find themselves lost with no life to return to post-war; war is their life and will continue to be. They find themselves struggling to cope with the loss of fallen brothers, and although they perished years ago, are still a vivid image in the veteran's mind. Emotional disconnection paves the way for a ruinous impact on the soldier's life. Slowly, and then all at once, without warning or guidance, every casualty visits the mind of a soldier. *All Quiet on the Western Front* explores bonds between comrades while giving insight into the effects on the soldier's mental health. Remarque's novel proves people can be destroyed by death before they are physically killed by death.