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REMARQUE'S

ALL QUIET ON THE WESTERN FRONT



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ALL QUIET ON THE WESTERN FRONT

NOTES

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- *Life and Background of the Author*
- *General Plot Summary*
- *Remarque's Introductory Note*
- *Critical Commentaries*
- *Remarque's Style*
- *Remarque as a Social Critic*
- *Character Analyses*
- *Questions for Review*

by

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ALL QUIET ON THE WESTERN FRONT NOTES

AUTHOR'S LIFE AND BACKGROUND

Erich Maria Remarque was born in Osnabrück in Westphalia, Germany, on June 22, 1898. His father, a bookbinder by trade, was German; his mother was of French descent. As a youth he attended the gymnasium (equivalent to our elementary school) and seminar in the town where he lived. While attending the University of Münster, he was drafted into the German army. He was eighteen years old at the time of his induction.

During World War I Remarque fought at the Western Front and was wounded five times, the last time seriously. Following his discharge from the army, he worked at a series of professions, all of which became the subject matter of later novels. The same "lostness" felt by Paul Baumer in *All Quiet on the Western Front* seems to have controlled its author in the decade following the Great War. After completing a teaching course offered by the German government to war veterans, Remarque taught school for a year in a town near the Dutch border.

His restlessness and physical energy led him to a job as a salesman for a tombstone firm. These experiences as a dealer in the "appurtenances of grief" can be found in a novel entitled *The Black Obelisk*. Having had his fill of the business world, Remarque joined a group of friends in a "gypsy caravan" touring Germany.

His wanderings temporarily completed, Remarque's future literary career gained momentum when he wrote articles for a Swiss automobile magazine and later advertising copy for the same tire company. During this period Remarque became passionately interested in automobile racing and automotive mechanics. These interests form the backdrop for his novel *Heaven Has No Favorites*.

Eventually Remarque's literary inclinations and enthusiasm for sports brought him to write *Sport im Bild*. It was at this time that *All Quiet on the Western Front* was written, the theme of which had disturbed Remarque since the war.

Published in 1928, the original manuscript had been refused by one publisher and only reluctantly accepted by another. The novel's success was immediate and overwhelming, selling almost 1½ million copies during the first year. The unusual appeal of the book is reflected in the book's first year sales by countries. German readers alone bought 800,000 copies. The United States sales were 240,000. French readers purchased 219,000 copies, and the British, 195,000 copies. It was subsequently translated and published in 25 languages. The book was later made into two different motion pictures and was equally successful in film form.

Despite its success, the book generated a storm of controversy in Germany. Some people charged that the book was "replete with effeminate pacifism;" others claimed that it was really "romantic propaganda for war." Remarque stated in an interview that these contradictory criticisms stemmed from his refusal to declare himself politically. He told one interviewer that he had been misunderstood only in those quarters where one would be misunderstood anyway. He felt no need to take part in the controversy.

Whatever political overtones the book did or did not possess have since been resolved. The novel continues to be a definitive exposé of war.

After his first successful work, Remarque devoted more of his time to writing. The following novels were written in subsequent years:

<i>The Road Back</i>	1931
<i>Three Comrades</i>	1937
<i>Flotsam</i>	1941
<i>Arch of Triumph</i>	1946

<i>Spark of Life</i>	1952
<i>A Time to Love and a Time to Die</i>	1954
<i>The Black Obelisk</i>	1957
<i>Heaven Has No Favorites</i>	1961
<i>Night in Lisbon</i>	1964

Because of his untenable position in Nazi Germany, Remarque went to live at Porto Ronco on Lake Maggiore in Switzerland where he later bought a house. His emigration became permanent when the Nazis came to power. Because he would not voluntarily return and continued to write critically of the Nazi party, his books were burned, his films banned, and in 1938 his citizenship was revoked.

Remarque first visited the United States in 1939. In 1947, he became an American citizen, dividing his time between New York and Switzerland.

Since the publication of *All Quiet on the Western Front*, only *Arch of Triumph*, the story of a love affair in Paris between a German refugee doctor and a Parisian actress just before the outbreak of World War II, has had the same international success. Most of his works have enjoyed greater popular acclaim than critical success.

GENERAL PLOT SUMMARY

All Quiet on the Western Front is the record of seven school-mates who are representative of a generation destroyed by the shells and pressures of World War I. Because of the urgings of their teacher, Kantorek, whom they trust, all seven enlist in the army to serve the Fatherland. Paul Baumer, a young and sensitive member of the group, narrates the story.

Chapter 1

The story opens behind the German front lines. Paul and his friends are less naive as a result of their battle experience. Josef Behm has already been killed. Franz Kemmerich has had his leg amputated. A letter from Kantorek stirs the group's anger and despair at their shattered lives.

Chapter 2

The experience of military training and the war has been disillusioning for Paul and his friends. Corporal Himmelstoss wrung much of their youthful idealism out of them during basic training. The comradeship and esprit-de-corps are the only worthwhile results of their military training. At the end of the scene, Kemmerich, Paul's childhood friend, dies from his amputation.

Chapter 3

The focus in this chapter is on Kat who typifies the shrewd, self-reliant soldier. No matter what the situation, Kat is able to find food and supplies for his friends. News of Himmelstoss' arrival at the front causes Paul and his friends to remember the night before they left and how they revenged themselves on Himmelstoss.

Chapter 4

The action of this chapter is at the front. Paul and his unit have been assigned the job of laying barbed wire. While returning to the waiting trucks, Paul's company undergoes a terrific bombardment. Chapter 4 is a complete description of front-line war.

Chapter 5

Himmelstoss appears at the front and tries to make friends with Paul and his friends. He is insulted and generally abused but succeeds in having Tjaden and Kropp given light company punishment. The comradeship theme is developed further when Kat and Paul steal a goose and share it with their friends.

Chapter 6

The battle pattern described in this chapter is typical of trench warfare during World War I. Paul and his friends remain on the

“line” throughout the summer and return to the rear for a rest in the fall.

Chapter 7

Paul and his comrades are moved farther behind the lines for a rest. Their time is spent eating, sleeping, and being friendly with local girls. Paul is sent home for a seventeen day leave. His homecoming is disappointing because he feels that he no longer fits or belongs. The war has destroyed his ambition and youthful pleasures. In Paul’s mind the despair brought about by the war is emphasized by what he finds while on furlough.

Chapter 8

Before returning to his outfit, Paul goes through a refresher military training course at a camp on the moors. There he discovers that the men in a Russian prison camp are also human beings. This revelation further confirms doubts about the war.

Chapter 9

Returning to his unit, Paul feels the sense of belonging he was unable to feel at home. After being inspected by the Kaiser, the company is sent again to the front. In a patrol action Paul is forced to kill a French soldier named Gerard Duval. This act brings him face to face with his enemy, and he is conscience stricken by his act of murder.

Chapter 10

For three weeks Paul’s squad is given the duty of guarding a supply depot. This turns out to be plush assignment, for there is an abundance of food and items of comfort. While trying to evacuate a village, Kropp and Paul are wounded. They succeed in being placed in the same hospital. Kropp’s leg must be amputated. Paul recovers sufficiently to be given a leave and then returned to active duty.

Chapter 11

The action of this chapter takes place during the last summer of the war. The German war machine is crumbling, and the front line no longer exists. All of Paul’s schoolmates have been killed. In this chapter Paul’s best friend, Kat, is wounded, then killed by a flying

splinter while being carried to a dressing station. The death of Kat is a mortal blow to Paul.

Chapter 12

The time is the fall of 1918. Paul is killed one month before the armistice on an exceptionally quiet day on the Western Front.

CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

Paul Baumer

The soldier, narrator and focal point of the novel who volunteered with four others from his class for military duty. Paul's group included: Muller, Kropp, Leer, Kemmerich and Behm.

Tjaden (pronounced Jahden)

A thin soldier with an immense appetite. He is nineteen and a former locksmith in civilian life.

Muller

A soldier who carries his school books with him and often dreams of examinations. He is the first to inherit Kemmerich's fine leather boots.

Stanislaus Kaczinsky

Kat is a forty year old soldier who becomes Paul's best friend. He is shrewd, good-natured and known for his remarkable ability to find good food and soft jobs for the group.

Albert Kropp

First soldier of Paul's group to make lance-corporal. He was regarded as the best student in Paul's school class. He is discharged after leg amputation.

Leer

Paul's youthful classmate who grows a beard. He is first of Paul's school group to have experience with women.

Franz Kemmerich

Paul Baumer's childhood friend and fellow volunteer. Early in the novel he dies following a leg amputation. He is the first of the group to wear the fine leather boots.

Haie Westhus

The soldier who prefers the army to digging peat in civilian life.

Detering

The soldier who was a peasant-farmer in civilian life and thinks constantly of his farm and wife.

Kantorek

The schoolmaster who urged Paul and his friends to enlist. He is later called into the reserves under Mittlestaedt, a former pupil.

Corporal Himmelstoss

The drillmaster for Paul and his comrades, hated for his sadistic treatment of recruits. He is a former postman.

MINOR CHARACTERS***Josef Behm***

First of Paul's schoolmates to be killed in the war.

Lieutenant Bertinck

Paul's company commander who is a fine soldier, respected by his men.

Ginger

The company cook who is more concerned about his personal safety and accurate food portions than he is concerned about feeding the men.

Tiejien

The soldier briefly recalled when Kemmerich dies. He called for his mother while dying and held off a doctor with a dagger until he collapsed.

Sergeant Oellrich

A sniper who takes pride in his ability to pick off enemy soldiers.

Heinrich Bredemeyer

A soldier who has told Paul's mother about the increasing dangers in front line fighting.

Mittelstaedt

Paul's friend who has been promoted to company commander of a home guard. He has the opportunity to take revenge on school-master Kantorek who is only an ordinary soldier.

Boettcher

The soldier who was the school porter at Paul's former school.

Josef Hammacher

The soldier who shares the hospital ward with Paul, Albert and others. He has a "shooting license" because of his mental derangement.

Little Peter

One of Paul and Albert's hospital ward mates. He is thought to be the only patient ever to return from the "Dying Room."

Franz Wachter

A hospital ward mate who dies of a lung wound.

Sister Libertine

One of the sister-nurses at the hospital where Paul and Albert recover from their wounds.

Berger

The strongest soldier in Paul's company. During the last days, Berger loses his sense of judgment. He is wounded trying to rescue a messenger dog under fire.

Gerald Duval

The French soldier who lands in Paul's shell hole. Paul stabs him. After he dies, Paul discovers Duval, the enemy, is also human.

—a printer with a wife and child. Paul realizes the enemy on the other side of the barbed wires is just a lonely, frightened soldier like himself.

REMARQUE'S INTRODUCTORY NOTE

All Quiet on the Western Front is prefaced by a brief statement of the novel's purpose. Here the author makes it clear that the story is not an accusation of an individual or group. It was not Remarque's intention to align himself with any particular German political party. The reader is also warned against viewing the book as an exciting adventure. This is an account of a generation of young men destroyed physically and spiritually by the experience of the war.

The book is not concerned with depicting the events of the war. The essential point is to describe war's effects on a particular generation.

It was Remarque's contention that his generation had grown up in a way different from others before and after it. Their overwhelming experience was the war. Shortly after publication of his novel, the young author declared, "The generation of young people, which no matter from what motive, has been driven through this period must necessarily have developed differently from all former generations." The men who emerged from the trenches were marked for life by deep, irreparable psychic wounds. For these young disillusioned, the world could never again hold the same innocence it had when the century was just beginning. As Jacques Barzun has put it, "The energies born with the twentieth century had been sapped, misspent and destroyed."

In a mood characterized by despair, disgust and disquiet, the youth of Europe and America returned to their private lives in 1918 to attempt to live in a world that no longer held sacred the ideals and beliefs that prevailed prior to 1914. Gertrude Stein, when she said to young Ernest Hemingway in Paris, "You are all a lost generation," summed up the dilemma Paul Baumer and his comrades would have faced had they lived.

CHAPTER 1

Summary

The novel opens behind the German front lines. What remains of Paul Baumer's company has moved back from the Western Front for a short rest after fourteen days of heavy fighting. The soldiers have been well fed. Rations for twice as many men had been prepared.

Among the mail distributed to the soldiers is a letter from Kantorek, the teacher who had persuaded Paul and his classmates to volunteer for military service. Paul comments that Kantorek is one of the little men who seem to create much of the world's unhappiness.

One of the students Kantorek succeeded in recruiting was Josef Behm. Behm was the first of Paul's schoolmates to be killed in the war. Paul realizes that Kantorek was only indirectly to blame for Behm's death, for the world is filled with men like Kantorek who must share the guilt.

Thoughts of Behm and Kantorek lead Paul to a bitter observation of the older generation. He reflects, "The idea of authority, which they represented, was associated in our minds with a greater insight and a manlier wisdom." The first bombardment and the first killing shattered this faith in the adult world. Paul and his generation feel betrayed and alone in the world they have inherited.

The second scene of the chapter focuses on Franz Kemmerich, another of Paul's comrades. Kemmerich is at a dressing station where he has just had his leg amputated. It is obvious that Kemmerich will die. Motivated by practical considerations, Muller tries unsuccessfully to persuade Kemmerich to part with his airman's boots. Muller knows that the hospital orderlies will take them as soon as Kemmerich is dead. Outside the room Kropp and his friends bribe an orderly with cigarettes to give Kemmerich morphine to ease his pain. Even with the bribe Kropp must go along to see to it that the drug is given.

The last scene of the chapter takes place back at the huts. Kropp becomes savagely angry at Kantorek's letter referring to Kropp and his friends as the "Iron Youth." Paul reflects on the word, "youth." Although none of his comrades are more than twenty, they are old, prematurely aged by the devastating experiences of war.

Commentary

The purpose of Chapter One is to establish the novel's setting, point of view, atmosphere, themes and briefly introduce the characters. Plot development is relatively unimportant in this opening chapter.

The setting is behind the German front lines during the latter part of World War I. The tide of German victories has turned, and a tired Germany now faces reinforced Allied troops. Paul Baumer, the narrator of the book, will be the character through whom you will witness the war and its effects on the other characters. Paul is typical of the young German infantry soldier who fought in the war. Although he is only twenty, he has matured beyond his years because of his experiences in the trenches. Paul's viewpoint represents the viewpoint of the author.

Note that although the story is told from the German point of view, its message is universal and representative of the thoughts and feelings of the soldiers of all of the countries that participated in the Great War. As you read through the novel, you will not be conscious of the fact that the narrative is about Germans and German action. The horror of the war belonged to all men regardless of nationality.

The general mood of a work is referred to as atmosphere. The atmosphere of this novel is pervaded by death and destruction, hopelessness and desolation. Occasionally, moments of laughter or a bit of human warmth appear unexpectedly. The light contrast sharpens one's awareness of the terrifying destruction and dangers.

The center theme of the book is the vivid portrayal of the horror and stupidity of all war. Minor themes emerge from time to

time. The theft of Kemmerich's watch while at the dressing station is an example of the general decay of moral value fostered by the war. This theme will be repeated. As the novel progresses, the reader, like the hospital orderly, becomes immune to these smaller acts of immorality. The moral decline, resulting from the war, was one of the great social wounds the post war world had to attempt to heal.

CHAPTER 2

Summary

The chapter begins with Paul's thoughts about his earlier life. His present existence at the front makes memories of his youthful experiences seem vague and unreal. Because they did not have the opportunity to begin families, careers or develop strong interests, Paul and his generation feel a sense of emptiness and isolation from their society. As a result, Paul concludes that his generation has become a wasteland.

It is clear to Paul that ten years of schooling have had far less effect than ten weeks of military training. While the school attempts to teach the value of thinking, the military swiftly crushes individuality and fits people to a system. Recruits quickly discover that rank deserves more respect than wisdom.

Kropp, Muller, Kemmerich and Paul were assigned to training under the command of Corporal Himmelstoss. Himmelstoss, a mailman in civilian life, took personal satisfaction from treating recruits harshly. Because of their youthful, defiant spirit, he took a special dislike to Paul and his friends. No amount of harassment, however, could conquer their spirit, and in the end Himmelstoss was forced to give up. Paul recognizes his training as having been necessary for survival at the front. From it grew comradeship and esprit-de-corps, two positive results.

The action of the chapter takes place in Kemmerich's hospital room. It is evident from the beginning of the scene that Kemmerich is about to die. He knows that his leg has been amputated, and his pathetic statement, "I wanted to become a head-forester once,"