

VINTAGE REMARQUE

All Quiet on
the Western Front



All Quiet on the Western Front

by

Erich Maria Remarque

1929



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All Quiet on the Western Front

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One of the most influential anti-war films ever made, this drama follows a group of idealistic young men as they join the German Army during World War I and are sent to the Western Front.

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About the Author

Erich Maria Remarque was born in Osnabrück in 1898. Exiled from Nazi Germany, and deprived of his citizenship, he lived in America and Switzerland. The author of a dozen novels, Remarque died in 1970.

Brian Murdoch was born in 1944. He is Professor of German at Stirling University.

Translator's Note

This new translation has been made from the first edition of Erich Maria Remarque's *Im Westen nichts Neues*, published in Berlin by Ullstein under their Propyläen imprint early in 1929. The familiar English title of Remarque's novel, however, was provided by A. W. Wheen in 1929. Although it does not match the German exactly (there is a different kind of irony in the literal version, 'Nothing New on the Western Front'), Wheen's title has justly become part of the English language, and it is retained here with gratitude, and as a memorial to Remarque's first English translator.

Dedication

This book is intended neither as an accusation nor as a confession, but simply as an attempt to give an account of a generation that was destroyed by the war – even those of it who survived the shelling.

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We are in camp five miles behind the line. Yesterday our relief arrived; now our bellies are full of bully beef and beans, we've had enough to eat and we're well satisfied. We were even able to fill up a mess-tin for later, every one of us, and there are double rations of sausage and bread as well – that will keep us going. We haven't had a stroke of luck like this for ages; the cook-sergeant, the one with the ginger hair, is actually offering to dish out food, beckoning with his serving ladle to anyone who comes near him and giving him a massive helping. He's getting a bit worried because he can't see how he's going to empty his cooking pot. Tjaden and Müller have dug out a couple of washing bowls from somewhere and got him to fill them up to the brim as a reserve supply. Tjaden does things like that out of sheer greed; with Müller it's a precaution. Nobody knows where Tjaden puts it all. He's as thin as a rake and he always has been.

The most important thing, though, is that there are double rations of tobacco as well. Ten cigars, twenty cigarettes and two plugs of chewing tobacco for everyone, and that's a decent amount. I've swapped my chewing tobacco with Kaczinsky for his cigarettes, and that gives me forty. You can last a day on that.

And on top of it all, we're not really entitled to this lot. The army is never *that* good to us. We've only got it because of a mistake.

Fourteen days ago we were sent up the line as relief troops. It was pretty quiet in our sector, and because of that the quartermaster drew the normal quantity of food for the day we were due back, and he catered for the full company of a hundred and fifty men. But then, on the very last day, we were taken by surprise by long-range shelling from the heavy artillery. The English guns kept on pounding our position, so we lost a lot of men, and only eighty of us came back.

It was night-time when we came in, and the first thing we did was get our heads down so that we could get a good night's sleep. Kaczinsky is right when he says that the war wouldn't be nearly as bad if we could only

get more sleep. But there is no chance of that at the front, and two weeks for every spell in the line is a long time.

It was already midday when the first of us crawled out of the huts. Within half an hour every man had his mess-tin in his hand and we were lining up by the cookhouse, where there was a smell of proper food cooked in good fat. Needless to say, the hungriest were at the front of the queue: little Albert Kropp, who is the cleverest of us, and was the first one to make it to acting lance-corporal. Then Müller – one of the five boys called that at our school – who still lugs his textbooks about with him and dreams about taking his school leaving diploma later under the special regulations. He even swots up physics formulae when there is a barrage going on. Then Leer, who has a beard, and is obsessed with the girls from the officers-only knocking-shops; he swears that they are obliged by army regulations to wear silk slips, and that they have to take a bath before entertaining any guest with the rank of captain or above. And fourthly me, Paul Bäumer. All four of us are nineteen years old, and all four of us went straight out of the same class at school into the war.

Close behind us are our friends. Tjaden, a skinny locksmith who is the same age as us and the biggest glutton in the company. He's thin when he sits down to eat and when he gets up again he's got a pot-belly; Haie Westhus, the same age, a peat-digger, who can quite easily hold an army-issue loaf in one great paw and ask, 'Guess what I've got in my hand?'; Detering, a farmer, who thinks about nothing but his bit of land and his wife; and finally Stanislaus Kaczinsky, leader of our group, tough, crafty, shrewd, forty years old, with an earthy face, blue eyes, sloping shoulders and an amazing nose for trouble, good food and cushy jobs.

Our group was at the head of the grub queue. We were getting impatient, because the cook-sergeant didn't know what was going on and was still standing there waiting.

In the end Kaczinsky shouted to him, 'Come on, mate, open up your soup kitchen! Anyone can see the beans are done!'

But he just shook his head dozily. 'You've all got to be here first.'

Tjaden grinned. 'We are all here.'

The cook-sergeant still didn't get it. 'That would suit you nicely, wouldn't it. Come on, where are the rest?'