

‘There is a whistling sound behind us. Shells pass overhead and explode in a sheet of flame a hundred metres away.’

When Paul Bäumer and his classmates join the army, nothing has prepared them for the death and destruction that they witness. Machine guns, huge artillery shells and poison gas create a nightmare world for these young men and their older comrades.

For months and years attack is followed by counter-attack. Will any of Paul’s friends survive long enough to return to their families and loved ones? Will there be a place for them at home, when peace finally comes?

Can any of these soldiers make sense of the massive conflict in which they are involved?

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**Miniature
masterpieces**

- BBC R4, Open Book

ALL QUIET ON THE WESTERN FRONT

ERICH MARIA REMARQUE



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 **Baker Street**
Readers

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Retold by Tony Evans
Illustrated by Sarah Wimperis

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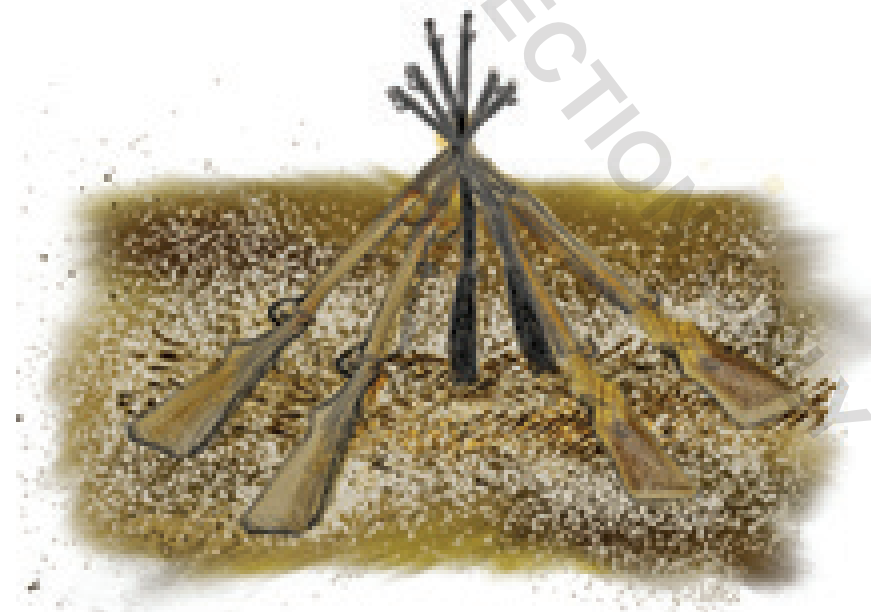
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THE CHARACTERS



Paul Bäumer

Paul is only nineteen years old and has left school to join the army. He has never been away from home before. How will he cope with life in the trenches?

Fredrich Müller

Fredrich is one of Paul's old schoolmates. He loves to study and wants to take his exams after the war. Will he survive the horrors of the battlefield?



Albert Kropp

Another young man who was at school with Paul, Albert is the cleverest of them all. But will his intelligence help him when he is sent to the front line?



Stanislaus Katszinsky

Katszinsky, known as Kat, is old enough to be Paul's father. He is very good at finding food and shelter, and the young soldiers admire him. Can he help them to deal with the hardships of war?



Tjaden

Tjaden was a locksmith before the war, and is only nineteen. He loves his food but never seems to put on weight.



Paul's mother

Paul's mother has been unwell for some time, but she has not told her son. How will he feel when he returns home on leave and finds her ill in bed?



Kantorek

Kantorek was Paul's teacher before the war, and persuaded Paul and his classmates to join the army. What will happen when he joins the Home Defence Force and finds that one of his old pupils is in charge?





ALL QUIET ON THE WESTERN FRONT

We are nine kilometres behind the front line. For the last two weeks we have been in the trenches, facing the enemy, but now it's our turn to get a few days' rest.

We've all had as much beef and beans to eat as we wanted, and we are feeling satisfied and happy. In fact there's such a lot of food that the cook has been giving out extra portions. Tjaden and Müller have even filled up a couple of washing bowls. Müller wants to make sure he has some food for later, if he needs it – Tjaden is just greedy.

All this extra grub wasn't good news for everyone. There were a hundred and fifty men in our company when we went up to the front line, and because it was pretty quiet in our stretch of the trenches, the quartermaster ordered enough supplies for the lot of us.

Then on the last day the British heavy guns shelled us from long range. High explosives landed all over our positions, and only eighty of us got back. The rest were either killed or injured. So we've had almost double rations – not just the beans and beef, but extra sausage, bread and tobacco.

I look at my comrades who are sitting in the camp hut, making the most of their break from the fighting. Four of us are nineteen years old, and last year we came straight out of the same class at school to join the army.

Nearest to me is little Albert Kropp, the cleverest pupil, who was the first to be promoted to lance-corporal. Next there's Müller, who wants to take his exams after the war, and still carries his school books around. Then Leer, who has grown a beard. All he can think about is girls.

As for me, the last of the classmates, I'm Paul Bäumer.

Since the four of us joined up we've made some good friends amongst the other recruits. Tjaden is the same age as we are. He eats more than anyone, but somehow he stays as thin as a stick, apart from his pot-belly when he's had a good meal. Before the war he was a locksmith.

Haie Westhus is the same age too. He was a labourer – a peat-digger – and he's a big lad with huge hands.

Detering is older. He's a farmer, and married, and is always talking about his wife and his farm.

Finally there's the leader of our little group, Stanislaus Katczinsky. We all call him Kat. Kat is forty years old, tough, cunning and clever. He's got a weather-beaten face, blue eyes and bent shoulders. He's helped us a lot. He always knows where to scrounge some good food, and how to make sure that our company gets the easiest jobs.

it is a work of fiction, the events of the book are based on the author's real life experiences. Erich Maria Remarque joined the German army in 1916, when he was eighteen years old – at the same age as the main character in the story, Paul Bäumer. Remarque was sent to the front line in 1917, where he was wounded. He then spent some time in hospital and did not return to active service.

The First World War was very different from the many previous wars experienced in Europe and in the rest of the world before 1914, and came as a terrible shock to those involved. For the first time modern weapons such as machine-guns and heavy artillery firing huge explosive shells were used on a very large scale. The senior army officers on both sides had no experience of this kind of warfare, and their main tactic was to keep sending thousands of soldiers out of their trenches across open ground to try to capture the enemy trenches opposite them. The result was a dreadful loss of life. Over eight million soldiers were killed, and many millions more were seriously wounded. Large numbers of civilians also died in the conflict.

An agreement to cease fighting – the armistice – took effect on 11th November 1918. In this book Paul is killed in October 1918, so his death took place just before the First World War ended. Sadly, thousands of soldiers died in the last weeks and days of the war, just like Paul.

Remarque's war novel quickly became a best seller, and was translated into many languages. Lots of readers of the book in 1929 would have had the same experiences as Paul and his comrades, or had relatives or friends who fought in the war on one side or the other.

Finding out more

We recommend the following books and websites to gain a greater understanding of Erich Maria Remarque and the world he lived in:

Books

- Robert Graves, *Goodbye to All That*, Penguin Classics, 2000.

The author describes his experiences as a young British army officer in the First World War.