



VINTAGE REMARQUE

**ALL QUIET on the  
WESTERN FRONT**



# Contents

Cover

About the Author

Also by Erich Maria Remarque

All Quiet on the Western Front

Translator's Note

Chapter 1

Chapter 2

Chapter 3

Chapter 4

Chapter 5

Chapter 6

Chapter 7

Chapter 8

Chapter 9

Chapter 10

Chapter 11

Chapter 12

Afterword

Bibliography

The History of Vintage

Copyright

## 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.

ALSO BY ERICH MARIA REMARQUE

*The Road Back*

*Three Comrades*

*The Spark of Life*

*A Time to Love and a Time to Die*

**ALL QUIET ON THE**

**WESTERN FRONT**

Erich Maria Remarque

**TRANSLATED FROM THE GERMAN BY**

**Brian Murdoch**

**AFTERWORD BY**

**Brian Murdoch**

**VINTAGE BOOKS**

London

### *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.

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.

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 Katczinsky 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. Katczinsky 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 slippers, 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 Kaczkinsky, 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 Kaczkinsky 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?'

'They won't be getting served by you today. It's either a field hospital or a mass grave for them.'

The cook was pretty shaken when he heard what had happened. He wasn't so sure of himself any more. 'But I cooked for a hundred and fifty men.'

Kropp elbowed him in the ribs. 'So for once we'll get enough to eat. Right, get on with it!'

Suddenly a light dawned in Tjaden's eyes. His pointed, mouse-like face positively glowed, his eyes narrowed with cunning, his cheeks twitched and he moved in closer. 'Bloody hell, then you must have drawn bread rations for a hundred and fifty men as well, right?'

The cook-sergeant nodded, confused and not thinking.

Tjaden grabbed him by the tunic. 'Sausage, too?'

Another nod from Ginger.

Tjaden's jaw was trembling. 'And tobacco?'

'Yes, the whole lot.'

Tjaden looked round, beaming all over his face. 'Christ Almighty, now that's what I call a bit of luck! Then all that stuff has to be for us! Everyone gets – hang on – right, exactly double of everything!'

When he heard that the ginger-headed cook-sergeant realized what was up, and told us that it wasn't on.

By now we were getting a bit restive, and pushed forward.

'Why isn't it on, carrot-top?' Kaczinsky wanted to know.

'Eighty men can't have the rations for a hundred and fifty.'

'We'll soon show you,' growled Müller.

'I wouldn't mind about the meal, but I can only give out the other rations for eighty,' insisted Ginger.

Kaczinsky was getting annoyed. 'Is it time they pensioned you off, or what? You didn't draw provisions for eighty men, you drew them for B Company, and that's that. So now you can issue them. We *are* B Company.'

We started to crowd him. He wasn't too popular – it was thanks to him that in the trenches we'd more than once got our food far too late, and cold into the bargain, just because he didn't dare bring his field kitchen close enough in when there was a little bit of shellfire; and that meant that our men had to make a far longer trip to fetch the food than those from other companies. On that score Bulcke, from A Company, was much better. It's true that he was as fat as a hamster in winter, but he used to carry the cooking-pots right to the front line himself if he had to.

We were just about in the right mood and there would certainly have been trouble if our company commander hadn't turned up. He asked what the argument was about, and for the moment all he said was, 'Yes, we had heavy losses yesterday –'

Then he looked into the cooking-pot. 'Those beans look good.'

Ginger nodded. 'Cooked in fat, with meat, too.'

Our lieutenant looked at us. He knew what we were thinking. He knew a lot of other things as well, because he had come to the company as an NCO and grown up with us. He took the lid off the pot again and had a sniff. 'Bring me a plateful as well. And give out all the rations. We can do with them.'

Ginger made a face. Tjaden danced around him.

'It's no skin off your nose! He acts as if the supplies depot was his own personal property. So get on with it now, you old skinflint, and make sure you don't get it wrong –'

'Go to hell,' spat Ginger. He was beaten – this was simply too much for him – everything was turned upside down. And as if he wanted to show that he just didn't care any more, he gave out half a pound of ersatz honey per head, off his own bat.

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It really is a good day today. There is even mail, nearly everyone has a couple of letters and newspapers. So we wander out to the field behind the barracks. Kropp has the round lid of a big margarine tub under his arm.

On the right-hand edge of the field they have built a huge latrine block, a good solid building with a roof. But that is only for new recruits, who haven't yet learned to get the best they can out of everything. We want something a bit better. And scattered all around are small individual thunder-boxes with precisely the same function. They are square, clean, made of solid wood, closed in, and with a really comfortable seat. There are handles on the sides so that they can be carried about.

We pull three of them together in a circle and make ourselves comfortable. We shan't be getting up again for the next couple of hours.

I can still remember how embarrassed we were at the beginning, when we were recruits in the barracks and had to use the communal latrines. There are no doors, so that twenty men had to sit side by side as if they

were on a train. That way they could all be seen at a glance – soldiers, of course, have to be under supervision at all times.

Since then we've learnt more than just how to cope with a bit of embarrassment. As time went by, our habits changed quite a bit.

Out here in the open air the whole business is a real pleasure. I can't understand why it was that we always used to skirt round these things so nervously – after all, it is just as natural as eating or drinking. And perhaps it wouldn't need to be mentioned at all if it didn't play such a significant part in our lives, and if it hadn't been new to us – the other men had long since got used to it.

A soldier is on much closer terms with his stomach and digestive system than anyone else is. Three-quarters of his vocabulary comes from this area and, whether he wants to express extreme delight or extreme indignation, he will use one of these pungent phrases to underline it. It is impossible to make a point as clearly and as succinctly in any other way. Our families and our teachers will be pretty surprised when we get home, but out here it's simply the language that everyone uses.

Being forced to do everything in public means that as far as we are concerned, the natural innocence of the business has returned. In fact it goes further than that. It has become so natural to us, that the convivial performance of this particular activity is as highly valued as, well, holding a cast-iron certainty of a hand when we are playing cards. It is not for nothing that the phrase 'latrine rumour' has come to mean all kinds of gossip; these places are the army equivalent of the street corner or a favourite bar.

Just at the moment we are happier than we would be in some luxuriously appointed lavatory, white tiles and all. The most a place like that could be is hygienic; out here, though, it is beautiful.

These are wonderfully mindless hours. The blue sky is above us. On the horizon we can see the yellow observation balloons with the sun shining on them, and white puffs of smoke from the tracer bullets. Sometimes you see a sudden sheaf of them going up, when they are chasing an airman.

The muted rumble of the front sounds like nothing more than very distant thunder. Even the bumble bees drown it out when they buzz past.

And all around us the fields are in flower. The grasses are waving, cabbage whites are fluttering about, swaying on the warm breezes of late summer, while we read our letters and newspapers, and smoke; we take our

caps off and put them on the ground beside us, the wind plays with our hair and it plays with our words and with our thoughts.

The three thunder-boxes are standing amid glowing red poppies.

We put the lid of the margarine tub on our knees and that gives us a solid base to play cards. Kropp has brought a pack. After every few hands we have a round of 'lowest score wins'. You could sit like this for ever and ever.

There is the sound of an accordion coming from the huts. Every so often we put the cards down and look at one another. Then someone says, 'I tell you, lads . . .' or: 'It could easily have gone wrong that time . . .' and then we are silent for a moment. There is a strong feeling of restraint in us all, we are all aware of it and it doesn't have to be spelt out. It could easily have happened that we wouldn't be sitting on our boxes here today, it was all so damned close. And because of that, everything is new and full of life – the red poppies, the good food, the cigarettes and the summer breeze.

Kropp asks, 'Have any of you seen Kemmerich again?'

'He's over at St Joseph,' I say.

Müller reckons that he got one right through the thigh, a decent blighty wound.

We decide to go and see him that afternoon.

Kropp pulls out a letter. 'Kantorek sends his regards.'

We laugh. Müller tosses his cigarette away and says, 'I wish *he* was out here.'

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Kantorek was our form-master at school, a short, strict man who wore a grey frock-coat and had a shrewish face. He was roughly the same size and shape as Corporal Himmelstoss, the 'terror of Klosterberg Barracks'. Incidentally, it's funny how often the miseries of this world are caused by short people – they are so much more quick-tempered and difficult to get on with than tall ones. I have always tried to avoid landing up in companies with commanders who are short – usually they are complete bastards.

Kantorek kept on lecturing at us in the PT lessons until the entire class marched under his leadership down to the local recruiting office and enlisted. I can still see him, his eyes shining at us through his spectacles and



his voice trembling with emotion as he asked, ‘You’ll all go, won’t you lads?’

Schoolmasters always seem to keep their sentiments handy in their waistcoat pockets; after all, they have to trot them out in lesson after lesson. But that never occurred to us for a moment at the time.

In fact, one of our class was reluctant, and didn’t really want to go with us. That was Josef Behm, a tubby, cheerful chap. But in the end he let himself be persuaded, because he would have made things impossible for himself by not going. Maybe others felt the same way as he did; but it wasn’t easy to stay out of it because at that time even our parents used the word ‘coward’ at the drop of a hat. People simply didn’t have the slightest idea of what was coming. As a matter of fact it was the poorest and simplest people who were the most sensible; they saw the war as a disaster right from the start, whereas those who were better off were overjoyed about it, although they of all people should have been in a far better position to see the implications.

Katczynsky says it is all to do with education – it softens the brain. And if Kat says something, then he has given it some thought.

Oddly enough, Behm was one of the first to be killed. He was shot in the eye during an attack, and we left him for dead. We couldn’t take him with us because we had to get back in a great rush ourselves. That afternoon we suddenly heard him shout out and saw him crawling around in no man’s land. He had only been knocked unconscious. Because he couldn’t see and was mad with pain he didn’t take cover, so he was shot down from the other side before anyone could get out to fetch him.

That can’t be linked directly with Kantorek, of course – where would we be if that counted as actual guilt? Anyway, there were thousands of Kantoreks, all of them convinced that they were acting for the best, in the way that was the most comfortable for themselves.

But as far as we are concerned, that is the very root of their moral bankruptcy.

They were supposed to be the ones who would help us eighteen-year-olds to make the transition, who would guide us into adult life, into a world of work, of responsibilities, of civilized behaviour and progress – into the future. Quite often we ridiculed them and played tricks on them, but basically we believed in them. In our minds the idea of authority – which is what they represented – implied deeper insights and a more humane

wisdom. But the first dead man that we saw shattered this conviction. We were forced to recognize that our generation was more honourable than theirs; they only had the advantage of us in phrase-making and in cleverness. Our first experience of heavy artillery fire showed us our mistake, and the view of life that their teaching had given us fell to pieces under that bombardment.

While they went on writing and making speeches, we saw field hospitals and men dying: while they preached the service of the state as the greatest thing, we already knew that the fear of death is even greater. This didn't make us into rebels or deserters, or turn us into cowards – and they were more than ready to use all of those words – because we loved our country just as much as they did, and so we went bravely into every attack. But now we were able to distinguish things clearly, all at once our eyes had been opened. And we saw that there was nothing left of their world. Suddenly we found ourselves horribly alone – and we had to come to terms with it alone as well.

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Before we set off to see Kemmerich we pack his things up for him – he'll be glad of them on his way home.

The clearing station is very busy. It smells of carbolic, pus and sweat, just like it always does. You get used to a lot of things when you are in the barracks, but this can still really turn your stomach. We keep on asking people until we find out where Kemmerich is; he is in a long ward, and welcomes us weakly, with a look that is part pleasure and part helpless agitation. While he was unconscious, somebody stole his watch.

Müller shakes his head, 'I always said that you shouldn't take such a good watch with you, didn't I?'

Müller is a bit bossy and tactless. Otherwise he would have kept his mouth shut, because it is obvious to everyone that Kemmerich is never going to leave this room. It makes no difference whether he gets his watch back or not – the most it would mean is that we could send it back home for him.

'How's it going, then, Franz?' asks Kropp.

Kemmerich's head drops back. 'OK, I suppose. It's just that my damned foot hurts so much.'

We glance at his bed-cover. His leg is under a wire frame, which makes the coverlet bulge upwards. I kick Müller on the shin, because he would be quite capable of telling Kemmerich what the orderly told us before we came in; Kemmerich no longer *has* a foot. His leg has been amputated.

He looks terrible, yellow and pallid, and his face already has those weird lines that we are so familiar with because we have seen them a hundred times before. They aren't really lines at all, just signs. There is no longer any life pulsing under his skin – it has been forced out already to the very edges of his body, and death is working its way through him, moving outwards from the centre, it is already in his eyes. There in the bed is our pal Kemmerich, who was frying horse-meat with us not long ago, and squatting with us in a shell hole – it's still him, but it isn't really him any more; his image has faded, become blurred, like a photographic plate that's had too many copies made from it. Even his voice sounds like ashes.

I remember the day when we were drafted out. His mother, a pleasant, stout woman, saw him off at the station. She was crying all the time, and her face was puffy and swollen. This embarrassed Kemmerich, because she was the least composed of all of them, practically dissolving in fat and tears. What's more, she picked me out, and kept grabbing my arm and begging me to keep an eye on Franz when we got out here. As it happens, he did have a very young face, and his bones were so soft that after just a month of carrying a pack he got flat feet. But how can you keep an eye on someone on a battlefield?

'You'll be going home now,' says Kropp. 'You would have had to wait at least another three or four months before you got leave.'

Kemmerich nods. I can't look at his hands, they are like wax. The dirt of the trenches is underneath his fingernails, and it is bluey-grey, like poison. It occurs to me that those fingernails will go on getting longer and longer for a good while yet, like some ghastly underground growths, long after Kemmerich has stopped breathing. I can see them before my eyes, twisting like corkscrews and growing and growing, and with them the hair on his caved-in skull, like grass on good earth, just like grass – how can all that be?

Müller leans forward. 'We've brought your things, Franz.'

Kemmerich gestures with one hand. 'Put them under the bed.'

Müller does as he says. Kemmerich starts on about the watch again. How can we possibly calm him down without making him suspicious?

Müller bobs up again with a pair of airman's flying boots, best quality English ones made of soft yellow leather, the sort that come up to the knee, with lacing all the way to the top – something really worth having. The sight of them makes Müller excited, and he holds the soles against his own clumsy boots and says, 'Are you going to take these with you, Franz?'

All three of us are thinking the same thing: even if he did get better he would only be able to wear one of them, so they wouldn't be any use to him. But as things are it would be a pity to leave them here – the orderlies are bound to pinch them the moment he is dead.

Müller repeats, 'Why don't you leave them here?'

Kemmerich doesn't want to. They are his prize possession.

'We could do a swap,' suggests Müller, trying again, 'you can really do with boots like that out here.' But Kemmerich won't be persuaded.

I kick Müller, and reluctantly he puts the splendid boots back under the bed.

We chat for a bit longer, and then say goodbye. 'Chin up, Franz.'

I promise him that I will come back tomorrow. Müller says that he will as well. He is still thinking about the flying boots and he wants to keep an eye on things.

Kemmerich groans. He is feverish. We get hold of a medical orderly outside, and try and persuade him to give Kemmerich a shot of morphia.

He says no. 'If we wanted to give morphia to everyone we'd need buckets of the stuff –'

'Only give it to officers, then, do you?' snarls Kropp.

I step in quickly and the first thing I do is give the orderly a cigarette. He takes it. Then I ask him, 'Are you allowed to give shots at all?'

He is annoyed. 'If you think I can't, what are you asking me for –?'

I press a few more cigarettes into his hand. 'Just as a favour –'

'Well, OK,' he says. Kropp goes in with him, because he doesn't trust him and wants to see him do it. We wait outside.

Müller starts on again about the flying boots. 'They would fit me perfectly. In these clodhoppers even my blisters get blisters. Do you think he'll last until we come off duty tomorrow? If he goes during the night we've seen the last of the boots –'

Albert comes back and says, 'Do you reckon –?'

'Had it,' says Müller, and that's that.

We walk back to camp. I'm thinking about the letter I shall have to write to Kemmerich's mother tomorrow. I'm shivering, I could do with a stiff drink. Müller is pulling up grass stems and he's chewing on one. Suddenly little Kropp tosses his cigarette away, stamps on it like a madman, stares round with an unfocused and disturbed look on his face and stammers, 'Shit! Shit! The whole damned thing is a load of shit!'

We walk on for a long time. Kropp calms down – we know what was wrong, it's just the strain of being at the front, we all get that way from time to time.

Müller asks him, 'What did Kantorek say in his letter?'

He laughs. 'He calls us "young men of iron".'

That makes the three of us laugh, though not because it is funny. Kropp curses. He is happy to be able to talk again –

And yes, that's it, that *is* what they think, those hundred thousand Kantoreks. Young men of iron. Young? None of us is more than twenty. But young? Young men? That was a long time ago. We are old now.