

"ALL QUIET ON THE WESTERN FRONT," by ERICH MARIA REMARQUE

CHAPTER I

We are at rest five miles behind the front. Yesterday we were relieved, and now our bellies are full of beef and barley soup. We are satisfied and at peace. Each man has another mess-tin full for the evening, and, what is more, there is a double ration of sausage and bread. That puts a man in fine trim. We have not had such luck as this for a long time. The cook with his carrot head is begging us to eat; he beckons with his hand to everyone that passes, and spoons him out a great dollop. He does not see how he can empty his stew-pot in time for coffee. Tjaden and Muller have produced two wash basins and had them filled up to the brim as a reserve. In Tjaden this is voracity, in Muller it is foresight. Where Tjaden puts it all is a mystery, for he is and always will be as thin as a rake.

What's more important still is the issue of a double ration of smokes. Ten cigars, 20 cigarettes, and two quids of cheap pipe tobacco; now that is decent. I have exchanged my chewing tobacco with Katerzinsky for his cigars, which means I have 40 altogether. That's enough for a day.

It is true we have no right to this windfall. The Prussian is not so generous. We have only a mis-calculation to thank for it.

Fourteen days ago we had to go up and relieve the front line. It was fairly quiet on our sector, so the quartermaster who remained in the rear had requisitioned the usual quantity of rations and provided for the full company of 150 men. But on the last day an astonishing number of English field guns opened up on us with high explosive, drumming ceaselessly on our position, so that we suffered heavily and came back only 80 strong.

Last night we moved back and settled down to get a good sleep for once. Katerzinsky is right when he says it would not be such a bad war if we could only get a little more sleep. In the line we have had next to none, and 14 days is a long time at one stretch!

It was noon before the first of us crawled out of our quarters. Half an hour later every man had his mess-tin and was gathered at the cook-house, which smells greasy and nourishing. At the head of the queue of course were the hungriest—little "Albert" Kropp, the clearest thinker among us and therefore the first to be lance-corporal; Muller, who still carries his school textbooks with him, dreams of examinations and during bombardment mutters prophecies in physics; Leeg, who wears a full beard and has a preference for the girls from officers' brothels. And as the fourth, myself, Paul Baumer. All four are 19 years of age, and all four joined up from the same class as volunteers for the war.

Close behind us were our friends; and our own age, the biggest eater of the company. He sits down to eat as thin as a grass-hopper and gets up as big as a bug in the family way: "Hale West-hus, of the same age, a peat digger, who can easily hold a ration-leaf in his hand and say: 'Guess what I've got in my glass?' " Then comes a peasant, who thinks of nothing but his farmyard and his wife; and finally Stanislaus Katerzinsky, the leader of our group, shrewd, cunning, and hard-bitten, 40 years of age, with a face of the soil, blue eyes, bent shoulders, and a remarkable nose for dirty weather, good food, and soft jobs.

Our gang formed the head of the queue before the cook-house. We were growing impatient, for the cook paid no attention to us.

Finally Katerzinsky called out to him: "Say, Heinrich, open up the soup kitchen. Anyone can see the beans are done."

"You must all be there first," Tjaden grinned. "We are all here."

The sergeant-cook still took no notice. "That may do for you," he said. "But where are the others?"

"They won't be fed by you today. They're either in the dressing-station or pushing up daisies."

The cook was quite unconcerned as the truth dawned on him. He was stammering: "And I have cooked for 150 men—"

Kropp poked him in the ribs. "Then for once we'll have enough. Come on, begin!"

Suddenly a vision came over Tjaden. His sharp, mousey features began to shine, his eyes grew small with cunning, his jaws twitched, and he whispered hoarsely: "Man! then you've got bread for 150 men, too, eh?"

The sergeant-cook nodded, absent-minded and bewildered. Tjaden seized him by the tunic. "And sausage?"

Ginger nodded again. Tjaden's chops quivered. "To-bacco, too?"

"Yes, everything." Tjaden beamed: "What a bean-feast! That's all for us! Each man gets a bit—yes, practically two issues."

Then Ginger stirred himself and said: "That won't do."

Then we got excited and began to crowd around.

"Why won't that do, you old carrot?" demanded Katerzinsky. "Eighty men can't have what is meant for 150."

"We'll soon show you," growled Muller.

"I don't care about the stew, but I can only issue rations for 80 men," persisted Ginger.

Katerzinsky got angry. "You might be generous for once. You haven't drawn food for 80 men. You've drawn it for the Second company. Good. Let's have it then. We are the Second company."

We began to jostle the fellow. No one felt kindly toward him, for it was his fault that the food twice came up to us in the line too late and cold. Under shell-fire he wouldn't bring his kitchen up near enough, so that our soup-carriers had to go much farther than those of other companies. Now Baumer of the First company is a much better fellow. He is as



But on the last day an astonishing number of English field-guns opened up on us with high-explosive, drumming ceaselessly on our position so that we suffered heavily and came back only eighty strong.

In the afternoon suddenly we heard him call, and saw him outside creeping towards us. He had only been knocked-unconscious. Because he could not see, and was mad with pain, he failed to keep down before anyone could go and fetch him.

Naturally we couldn't blame Katerzinsky for this. Where would the world be if one brought every man to book? There were thousands of Katerzinskys, all of whom were convinced that there was only one way of doing well, and that was theirs.

And that is just why they let us down so badly.

For us lads of 18 they ought to have been mediators and guides to the world of maturity, the world of work, of duty, of culture, of progress—to the future. We often made fun of them and played jokes on them, but in our hearts we trusted them. The idea of authority, which they represented, was associated in our minds with a greater insight and a manlier wisdom. But the first death we saw shattered this belief. We had to recognize that our generation was more to be trusted than theirs. They surpassed us only in phrases and in cleverness.

The first bombardment showed us our mistake, and under it the world as they had taught it to us broke in pieces.

While they continued to write and talk, we saw the wounded and dying. While they taught that duty to one's country is the greatest thing, we already knew that death-throws are stronger. But for all that we were no mutineers, no deserters, no cowards—they were free with all these expressions. We loved our country as much as they; we went courageously into every action; but also we distinguished the false from the true, and we saw that there was nothing of their world left. We were all at once terribly alone; and alone we must see it through.

Before going over to see Kemmerich we pack up his things; he

will need them on the way back. In the dressing-station there is great activity; it reeks as ever of carbolic, ether and sweat. Most of us are accustomed to this in the billets, but here it makes one feel faint. We ask for Kemmerich. He lies in a large room and receives us with feeble expressions of joy and helpless agitation. While he was unconscious someone had stolen his watch.

Muller shakes his head: "I always told you that nobody should carry as good a watch as that."

Muller is rather crude and tactless, otherwise he would hold his tongue, for anybody can see that Kemmerich will never come out of this place again. Whether he finds his watch or not will make no difference. At the most one will be only able to send it to his people.

"How goes it, Franz?" asks Kropp. Kemmerich's head sinks. "Not so bad . . . but I have such a damned pain in my foot."

We look at his bed covering. His leg lies under a wire basket. The bed covering arches over it. I kick Muller on the shin, for he is just about to tell Kemmerich what the orderlies told us outside: that Kemmerich has lost his foot.

The leg is amputated. He looks ghastly yellow, and wan. Already the strained lines that we know so well, we have seen them hundreds of times.

They are not so much lines as marks. Under the skin the life no longer pulses, it has already passed out to the boundaries of the body. Death is working through from within. It already has command in the eyes. Here lies our comrade, Kemmerich, who a little while ago was roasting horse-flesh with us and squatting in the shell-holes. He is still and yet it is not he any longer. His features have become uncertain and faint like a photographic plate on which two pictures have

been taken. Even his voice sounds like ashes. I think of the time when we went away. His mother's good, plump matron, brought him to the station. She wept copiously; her face was bloated and swollen. Kemmerich felt embarrassed, for she was the least composed of all; she simply dissolved into fat and water. Then she caught sight of me and took hold of my arm again and again, and implored me to look after Franz out there. Indeed he did have a face like a child, and such frail bones that after four weeks pack-carrying he already had flat feet. But how can a man look after anyone in the field.

"Now you will soon be going home," says Kropp. "You would have had to wait at least three or four months for your leave."

Kemmerich nods. I cannot bear to look at his hands, they are like wax. Under his nails is the dirt of the trenches, it shows through blue-black like poison. It strikes me that these nails will continue to grow like long, fantastic cellophane plants long after Kemmerich breathes no more. I see the picture before me. They twist themselves into corkscrews and grow and grow and with them the hair on the decayed skull, just like grass in a good soil, just like grass, how can it be possible.

Muller leans over. "We have brought your things, Franz."

Kemmerich signs with his hand. "Put them under the bed."

Muller does so. Kemmerich starts on again about the watch. He wears one calm him without making him suspicious.

Muller reappears with a pair of almanac's boots. They are fine English boots of soft, yellow leather which reach to the knee and lace all the way—they are things to be coveted.

Muller is delighted at the sight of them. He matches their soles against his own clumsy boots and says: "Will you be taking them with you, Franz?"

We all three have the same thought; even if he should get better, he would be able to use only one—they are no use to him. But is things are now it is a pity that they should stay here; the orderly will of course grab them as soon as he is dead.

"Won't you leave them with us?" Muller repeats.

Kemmerich doesn't want to. They are his most prized possessions.

"Well, we could exchange," suggests Muller again. "Out here one can make some use of them." Still Kemmerich is not to be moved.

I tread on Muller's foot; reluctantly he puts the fine boots back again under the bed.

"We talk a little more and then take our leave."

"Cheerio, Franz."

I promise him to come back in the morning. Muller talks of doing so too. He is thinking of the lace-up boots and means to be on the spot.

Kemmerich groans. He is feverish. We get hold of an orderly outside and ask him to give Kemmerich a dose of morphia.

He refuses. "If we were to

give morphia to everyone we would have to have tubs full—"

"You only attend to officers properly," says Kropp viciously. "I hastily intervene and give him a cigarette. He takes it."

"Are you usually allowed to give it, then?" I ask him.

He is annoyed. "If you don't think so, then why do you ask?"

I press a couple more cigarettes into his hand. "Do us the favour—"

"Well, all right," he says. Kropp goes in with him. He doesn't trust him and wants to see. We remain outside.

Muller returns to the subject of the boots. "They would fit me perfectly. In these boots I get blister after blister. Do you think he will last till tomorrow after drill? If he passes out in the night we know where the boots—"

Kropp returns. "Do you think—" he asks.

"Done for," says Muller emphatically.

We go back to the beds, I think of the letter that I must write tomorrow to Kemmerich's mother.

I am freezing. Muller pulls up some grass and chews it. Suddenly little Kropp throws his cigarette away, stamps on it savagely, and looking around him with a broken and distracted face, stammers: "Damned swine, the damned swine!"

"We walk on for a long time. Kropp has calmed himself; we understand; he sees red, out here where every man gets like that sometimes."

"What has Katerzinsky written to you?" Muller asks him.

He laughs. "We are the Iron Youth."

We all three smile bitterly. Kropp rails; he is glad that he can speak.

Yes, that's the way they think, those 100,000 Katerzinskys. Iron Youth! Youth! We are none of us more than 20 years old. But young? Youth? That is long ago. We are old folk.

(To be continued)

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