
An analysis of the isolation caused by war in *All quiet in the Western Front*

“I hate war as only a soldier who has lived it can, only as one who has seen its brutality, its stupidity” (Eisenhower 1). These are words written by Dwight Eisenhower, a Five Star General in the United States Army, and a veteran soldier from the Second World War. Eisenhower reveals how, although he did not die in the Second World War, he never really survived; the horrific events he endures form memories that stay with him for his entire life. Eisenhower’s inner feeling portray the thoughts of the fictional character Paul Baumer, the protagonist in *All Quiet on the Western Front*. Isolation is a key reason soldiers kept their hearts closed during the First World War. Through the eyes of Paul Baumer, Erich Remarque, the author of *All Quiet on the Western Front*, illustrates that along with the isolation from others, soldiers experience isolation from their families, and even themselves during the First World War.

The isolation from others is the most common form of isolation depicted in the novel, and occurring in the First World War. Soldiers train to be detached killing machines, having sympathy for neither comrades nor enemies. After stabbing a French artilleryman, Paul Baumer is forced to watch the enemy soldier die next to him. Baumer talks to the man and in doing so gains sympathy for him. When the artilleryman eventually ends up dying, Baumer is filled with dismay. “I do not mention the dead printer” (Remarque 228). Baumer does not tell his comrades about the encounter with the enemy soldier, as he knows that he is ridiculed and punished for sympathising with the enemy. Soldiers are instructed to not trust anyone. The First World War ruined soldiers by causing them to lose the ability to love. Another side effect that soldiers in the war experience is loneliness and the feeling that nobody could relate to them. Towards the end of the novel, Baumer says, “Let the months and years come, they can take nothing more. I am so alone, and so without hope that I can confront them without fear” (Remarque 295). War, particularly World War One, desensitizes soldiers from the world around them. When his final comrade “Kat” dies, Baumer feels as though there is nobody left who can relate to him. Furthermore, being isolated from someone as close to you as your family is far worse than being isolated from non-family members.

Soldiers returning home from the war are destined to experience isolation from their families. They feel as though nobody can relate to them, aside from other soldiers. Therefore, when soldiers are removed from the front, they have nobody to which they can relate. Regular townsmen are unable to grasp the horrors of war. In chapter seven of the novel, Paul Baumer is awarded a temporary leave from the front to go “home”; however, Baumer implies that he is

Need help with the assignment?

Our professionals are ready to assist with any writing!

GET HELP

unable to feel at home in his house. "I breathe deeply and say to myself: 'You are at home, you are at home.' But a sense of strangeness will not leave me, I cannot feel at home amongst these things" (Remarque 160). Even though Baumer has spent his entire childhood in a house he calls "home" and with people he calls "family", the house feels unfamiliar and the people seem like strangers. Later in the chapter, Baumer says "There is my mother, there is my sister...but I am not myself there. There is a distance, a veil between us" (Remarque 160). The war creates a permanent barrier between soldiers and the rest of society, depicted in the microcosm of Baumer and his family. Soldiers feel isolated from everyone around them, including their families. Above all, the worst form of isolation that soldiers experience is isolation from themselves.

In the First World War, soldiers felt desperation and loneliness to the point where shooting themselves to leave the front lines felt necessary. Committing suicide was very common during the First World War as a way to escape the horrors of the war. "He gropes for the fork, seizes it, and drives it with all his force against his heart" (Remarque 261). Paul Baumer refers to a soldier he is with in the hospital. The soldier disregards physical pain and tries to kill himself with a blunt fork to escape the mental and emotional torture that fills his life. Soldiers feel isolation from themselves, causing them to think with this mindset. When Baumer contemplates reading a novel at his house, he hopes that it can take him out of reality. "The breath of desire that then arose from the coloured backs of books, shall fill me again, melt the heavy, dead lump of lead that lies somewhere in me and waken again the impatience of the future, the quick joy in the worlds of thought, it shall bring back the lost eagerness of my youth" (Remarque 171). In the First World War, the perfect soldier is one who feels no emotions; a destructive killing machine that has no remorse. In becoming isolated from themselves, soldiers are transformed into emotionless, blank-faced, solitary people.

Through the isolation from others, family, and especially themselves, war destroys soldiers mentally and emotionally before they are inevitably killed physically. Isolation from others is the first form of isolation that soldiers experience, and they feel segregated from society as a result. Furthermore, soldiers experience isolation from their own families and have nobody to talk to about the tortures of war, causing them to feel alone and unable to relate to anybody. The final form of isolation that soldiers experience is isolation from themselves, resulting in tragedies such as self-mutilation and suicide. Not only do soldiers feel isolated from others, they feel isolated from their families and even themselves, as portrayed by Paul Baumer's perspective in *All Quiet on the Western Front*. "This book will try simply to tell of a generation of men who, even though they may have escaped shells, were destroyed by the war" (Remarque, Prologue). Long before Paul Baumer physically dies in the war, he dies emotionally and mentally through the isolation from others, his family, and from himself.

Works Cited:

Need help with the assignment?

Our professionals are ready to assist with any writing!

GET HELP

"Eisenhower Presidential Library." Eisenhower Presidential Library. Presidential Libraries System, n.d. Web. 14 Nov. 2014.

Remarque, Erich Maria. All Quiet on the Western Front. New York: Ballantine, 1982. Print.

gradesfixer.com

Need help with the assignment?

Our professionals are ready to assist with any writing!

GET HELP