

The Horrors of War

Millions dead, tens of millions injured, for what? For a petty argument between two countries. War is devastating to countries and most indefinitely individuals. Men can be left disturbed mentally, physically, and socially for the rest of their lives. Is this necessary? Well maybe you should decide after reading the next few paragraphs. You can decide if the war being fought is a war of dignity and glory as everyone would make it out to be or if it was a battle of death and gore. You maybe surprised at what happens to men out there.

Well it would be glorious to be wounded and or die for your country right? Well maybe if you were the one seeing everything from the outside looking in. If you were a soldier your outlook on war may be a little different. The physical ailments of the young men are terrible. Some even consider it lucky if you die. For example, Remarque made it very clear that he was aware of the pains men were forced to endure when he put Paul and Albert Kropp in the hospital. Paul was going on leave and asked Albert if there was anything that he could get for him and Kropp said, "A gun." Paul showed his disapproval of this idea and Albert said something to the degree of I would rather die then live without a leg. Another example was when Kat was wounded by the bomb that went off while he was delivering supplies to the men on the front. Kat could not even walk. Then while Paul was taking him back to the First Aid center the man said, "He's stone dead." Paul was so oblivious to what was going on that he simply replied, "No, he's just fainted." When he looked at his hand and found a bullet wound in the back of Kat's head he was so stunned that he could not even think or see straight. In the real world people would leave their homes cheerful young men and return tattered worn cripples. Men would return with missing appendages. Some would return without legs. Others would come home without sight or unable to breathe on their own. They may be deaf when they return but no one really fully realizes the horrors of war until they experience it for themselves.

Have you ever heard the word "shell shock". Many people have and really don't know exactly what it means. Well I'll tell you what it means. This horrible condition is one in which you no longer can think correctly or maintain a normal state of mind. One case of shell shock was reported after WWI. A man who was left helpless after a bomb was dropped and killed everyone around him. He was left to remain with his dead friends until the medic reached them, which took several days. After this incident he would drop to the floor and scramble under his bed whenever he heard the word bomb. He did it automatically. His brain just told him to. Another such example is when in Remarque's book the new recruit is crying and rocking back and forth on his bed. He would not go to battle. The others yelled at him but he would not or should I say could not move. His mental state was unstable. The effects of war on ones behavior mentally can be just as devastating as any physical injury. In the book All Quiet On the Western Front Remarque shows how even Himmelstoss, a corporal, can be affected by the war. He would not move out of the trench and even after Paul yelled, "You swine" and many other things he would not go. Paul was hitting him and he would not move. Until he heard the command from a higher officer he would not move. Another case of mental instability was a man who survived WWI. Every time someone would pull out an officer's red hat he would tremble and scream. He would stop as soon as it was gone but he could not handle the memories of war. Men would return home from war and not recognize any one including their own mothers and families.

The final aspect of war that I will talk about is the social aspect. In Remarque's book he had their teacher Kantorek telling the kids lies. "You are the

Iron Youth," he would say to them. Paul and his comrades would be excited and ready for war. They went and enlisted thinking that they would return war heroes and the town would glorify them. When they reached the front they realized that war was much different from what they were led to believe. Paul also realized that after a war like this he would not be able to return to society ever again and fit in. Soldiers go home and don't know how to react to society. They have seen so much death and violence that they don't know how to react to life and friendship. Life is hard for them. The imagined image of a war hero is thrown out and the void is filled with a life of hardships and trials.

Does war still sound like a logical solution to the problems between two countries? You decide. I think that Paul, Kat, Kropp, Tjaden and the rest of the characters in All Quiet on the Western Front would agree with me and say that it is not. War just leads to death and injury. There is no excuse for war and there never will be. As for glory and honor, well ask a man without legs about the glory and honor that he received when he returned. Or ask a man who can't hold a job because he can't fit in if he found honor and glory. Well you know what they say, "Dulce et Decorum Est."