

ALL QUIET ON THE WESTERN FRONT
(U.S., 1930, 132 Minutes)

“This story is neither an accusation nor a confession, and least of all an adventure, for death is not an adventure to those who stand face to face with it. It will try simply to tell of a generation of men who, even though they may have escaped its shells, were destroyed by the war”.

This prologue, taken almost verbatim from Erich Maria Remarque’s best-selling 1929 novel (Im Westen Nicht Neues), appears at the outset of the 1930 Hollywood film *All Quiet on the Western Front* (*AQWF*). The film follows a group of idealistic young men as they volunteer for the German Army during World War I and are assigned to the Western Front, where their sense of idealism and patriotism are slowly destroyed by the harsh realities of trench warfare. *AQWF* stresses the futility of war and the psychological pressure on the men who fight it. For these men, there is no glory, only death and disillusionment. Toward the end of the film, the principal character Paul Baumer (the young Remarque) trenchantly and realistically summarized his wartime experiences to a group of young students: “We live in the trenches. We fight. We try not to be killed. Sometimes we are. That’s all.”

The film has four basic sections: education and recruit training; arrival at the front; experiencing the cruelties and horrors of trench warfare; the hero’s homecoming, return to the front and ultimate death. Pay particular attention to the dialogue among the soldiers in various moments of reflection, especially on how wars begin and how the bonds of comradeship are forged by common traumatic experiences.

Filmed at Universal Studios, *AQWF* received two Academy Awards in 1930: Best Picture and Best Director (Lewis Milestone). Still watched by modern audiences, *AQWF* retains its initial power and poignancy. It portrays war from the common soldier's perspective in the genre of *Platoon* and *Saving Private Ryan*.