



FILM: **ALL QUIET ON THE WESTERN FRONT**

FDG RATING: 3.8 ☺☺☺☺○

Film Discussion Group (FDG) Scale is 1-5 (5 is best)

Edward Berger: *director*
Felix Krammerer: *actor, Paul Baumer*

DATE: March 19, 2023

DISCUSSION SUMMARY: **ALL QUIET ON THE WESTERN FRONT**

The 2022 film, *All Quiet On The Western Front*, (the third film adaptation of the book, after the 1930 and 1979 film versions) won an Oscar for best cinematography, best production design, best musical score, and best international film. It is a difficult film to watch because it is so well done. It is a horrifically realistic depiction of the gruesome atrocities of war, naivety of the innocent young boys who believe they are going to fight and return as heroes, and the ruthlessness of the military leaders who fill the boys' heads with dreams of patriotism. In fact, The New York Times film critic said the film "aims to pummel you with ceaseless brutality."

Film discussion participants almost unanimously agreed that the film was completely compelling with stunning camera work. We were especially drawn to the main character, idealistic 17 year old German boy, Paul Bäumer, who enlists in the Imperial German Army with his friends. It's 1917, three years into World War I. The boys are quickly exposed to the ugly realities of war, as each realizes they are not only fighting the enemy but are fighting to merely survive. One participant pointed to a powerful scene as Paul's wide-eyed face transforms to a look of terror. Another powerful scene was when the folded uniforms were handed to each boy. But this was preceded by a scene showing a room full of seamstresses who are laundering the bloodied uniforms of dead soldiers, stitching any rips in the cloth, and then folding them neatly for the next recruit.

Many of us thought Felix Krammerer, as Paul, deserved a best actor Oscar for his performance. Although he had previously acted on stage, this was his first acting role in a film. One discussion participant had hoped the film would show the effects that war had on Paul after he returns home.

There are too many powerful scenes to describe but they all underscore the film's themes and anti war message. The illusion of patriotism, the futility of war, the randomness of who lives and who dies, the egomania of military leaders, the propaganda rhetoric used to recruit, and the dehumanization of war are graphically and emotionally portrayed. And in the midst of the chaos are moments of tranquility such as when Paul and his comrades steal a goose to finally have some morsels of food, thinking they will soon be going home and then that moment is shattered in an instant. An extremely poignant, memorable scene is when Paul is fighting for his life, stabbing a French soldier as they are trapped in a trench and then feels remorse for what he has done and is overcome with empathy for the young boy.

An insightful comment from another discussion participant noted the journey that we take along side Paul as he changes from a nice young boy to a savage killer; we imagine that Paul would be a shell of his former self after the war ends.

The film adds an intriguing parallel storyline not found in the book, which follows the armistice negotiations to end the war. And to think that with all the battles and lives lost, no significant advancement was made by either side.

The title (same as the title of the 1929 novel by Erich Maria Remarque, a German veteran of World War I.) refers to what journalists would often report—with the government's support—that "all was quiet." The phrase was a euphemism, a reassuring way of saying they had nothing to report. Ironically, even on days with nothing major to report, shells still fell, shots were still fired, and men still suffered and died. The Front was never quiet.

A story that has been told before but perhaps each generation needs to hear it again.

All Quiet on the Western Front rallied a not-so-quiet score of 3.8 on our scale of 1 to 5. 5 is the best.



See you at the movies!
Adriane Dedic, adedic@pacbell.net
www.filmdiscussiongroup.com