

Further Reading 4: All Quiet on the Western Front

TASK: assess the usefulness of the following source (extracts from a book called 'All Quiet on the Western Front', written by a German war veteran called Erich Maria Remarque, and published in 1929). Write a paragraph commenting on what the source **content** can tell you (use quotes) and then consider the **author** and the **nature** of the source.

Extract 1: We are in camp five miles behind the line.

Yesterday our relief arrived; now our bellies are full of bully beef and beans, we've had enough to eat and we're well satisfied. We were even able to fill up a mess-tin for later, every one of us, and there are double rations of sausage and bread as well — that will keep us going.

The most important thing, though, is that there are double rations of tobacco. Ten cigars, twenty cigarettes and two plugs of chewing tobacco for everyone, and that's a decent amount. I've swapped my chewing tobacco with Kaczinsky for his cigarettes, and that gives me forty, You can last a day on that.



Extract 2: With the butt of his rifle, Kat smashes to pulp the face of one of the machine-gunners, who hasn't been wounded. We bayonet the others before they can get their grenades out. Then we gulp down thirstily the water they have been using to cool their gun. We toss explosives into the dugouts; the earth shakes, creaking, smoking and groaning, we stumble on over slippery fragments of flesh, over soft bodies; I fall into a belly that has been ripped open, and on the body is a new, clean, French officer's cap.

The fighting stops. We lose our contact with the enemy. Since we can't hold out here for a long time, we are brought back to our original position under covering fire from our artillery. We hardly know what we are doing as we dive into the nearest dugout to grab what we can of any provisions that we happen to see before we get away, especially tins of corned beef.

We get back in one piece. For the moment there are no more attacks from over there. We lie on the ground for more than an hour, getting our breath and resting, before anyone says

anything. We are so completely done in that we don't even think of the tinned beef, even though we are ravenously hungry. Only gradually do we turn into something like human beings again.

Extract 3: It really is a good day today. There is even mail, nearly everyone has a couple of letters and newspapers. So we wander out to the field behind the barracks. Kropp has the round lid of a big margarine tub under his arm. We put the lid of the margarine tub on our knees and that gives us a solid base to play cards. Kropp has brought a pack. After every few hands we have a round of 'lowest score wins'. You could sit like this for ever and ever.

There is the sound of an accordion coming from the huts. Every so often we put the cards down and look at one another. Then someone says, "I tell you lads.." or: "It could easily have gone wrong that time..." and then we are silent for a moment.

Extract 4: It is getting on for midday. The sun burns down and sweat stings our eyes, and when we wipe it away on our sleeves there is often blood there, too. We make it back to the first of our better maintained trenches. Our artillery gets going at full blast and makes an attack impossible. We lie in wait. The shellfire lifts a hundred yards and we go over the top again. Right next to me a lance-corporal gets his head blown off. He runs on for a few paces more with blood shooting up out of his neck like a fountain.

You get to the protection of the reserve trenches and you just want to crawl into them and disappear; but you have to turn around and go back into the terror. If we hadn't turned into automata at this moment we would have just lain down, exhausted, stripped of any will to go on. But we are dragged along forwards again with everyone else, but crazed, wild and raging, we want to kill, because now the others are our deadly enemies, their grenades and rifles are aimed at us, and if we don't destroy them they will destroy us.

Information about Erich Maria Remarque:

- Born in 1898 to a working class family and conscripted into the army at 18.
- On 12 June 1917, he was transferred to the Western Front, 2nd Company.
- On 31 July, he was wounded by shrapnel in the left leg, right arm and neck, and was taken to an army hospital in Germany where he spent the rest of the war. After the war he completed his teacher training.