Storm of Steel

INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF ERNST JÜNGER

Ernst Jünger was the eldest of six children born to Ernst Georg Jünger and Karoline Lampl. His father was a wealthy chemical engineer, and Ernst enjoyed a comfortable youth of attending boarding schools, writing poetry, and joining the *Wandervogel* movement—a youth movement that protested industrialization by encouraging young people to spend time in nature. Seeking adventure, he also ran away to join the French Foreign Legion, enlisting to serve in Algeria for five years, but being dismissed after several weeks due to his father's intervention. The following year, on August 1, 1914, Ernst volunteered for the German army and was sent to the front lines at Champagne. During the war, Ernst distinguished himself both in combat and as a leader, and he received many battle wounds and many awards—including the Pour le Mérite, the highest military honor awarded by the German Empire. He also kept 16 volumes of diaries which were adapted to become *Storm of Steel*. After the war, he became a noted entomologist, married Gretha von Jeinsen, and had two sons. Although Jünger was a critic of the postwar Weimar Republic, he also rejected the growing Nazi Party's attempts to win him over, twice turning down the offer of a Nazi seat in the Reichstag. Though he served as an army captain in World War II, his role was limited to an administrative post in Paris. His reputation as a staunch nationalist led to the suppression of his writings after that war, but his image was rehabilitated in the 1950s, and he became a major figure of West German literature; he published more than 50 books during his lifetime, including dystopian and science fiction novels. An atheist for almost all his life, Jünger converted to Roman Catholicism shortly before his death at age 102.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

World War I began in the summer of 1914, sparked by the assassination of the Austro-Hungarian Archduke Franz Ferdinand, and ended in November, 1918. On one side fought Germany and the Austro-Hungarian empire, and on the other fought the Western allies of France, Britain, Russia, and (eventually) the United States. Two of the distinctive developments of World War I included the emergence of mechanized warfare (e.g., the use of machine guns, tanks, and airplanes) and the prevalence of trench warfare, in which soldiers spent months living in opposing muddy trenches, often at a near stalemate as they fought over small sections of land up and down the warfront. Ernst Jünger also remarks on both sides' use of lethal poison gases, like phosgene, chlorine, and mustard gas, which caused great suffering and death. Some of the major engagements in which Jünger participated included the 1916 Somme Offensive—the largest battle on the Western front—and the Battle of Passchendaele in Flanders the following year.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

Storm of Steel was one of the very first accounts of World War I to be published; it was followed later in the 1920s by war memoirs like Robert Graves's *Goodbye to All That*, Erich Maria Remarque's *All Quiet on the Western Front* (in contrast to *Storm of Steel*, a novel portraying disillusionment among German soldiers), and the poetry of Siegfried Sassoon. Vera Brittain's memoir *Testament of Youth* describes the war from the perspective of a British volunteer nurse.

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** Storm of Steel (*In Stahlgewittern*)
- **When Written:** 1914-1920
- **Where Written:** Germany
- **When Published:** 1920
- **Literary Period:** Modern
- **Genre:** Memoir
- **Setting:** Western Front, World War I
- **Climax:** Jünger's final wounding and survival in August, 1918
- **Point of View:** First Person

EXTRA CREDIT

Many Revisions. As many as eight versions of *Storm of Steel* have appeared over the years, as Jünger revised it constantly. The more recent editions are significantly less bloody, and contain far fewer nationalistic comments, than the version he initially self-published in 1920.

An Unlikely Exchange. Despite Jünger's distaste for Nazism, Jünger and Hitler exchanged signed copies of their books—Jünger's 1925 follow-up book, *Fire and Blood*, and Hitler's *Mein Kampf*.

PLOT SUMMARY

In December 1914, a few months after the start of World War I, a young German man named Ernst Jünger arrives in Bazancourt, Champagne, France to train as a soldier. Like his training mates, he is eager for danger, ready to prove himself in

war. During his first morning on the front lines, however, a fatal explosion occurs nearby, and he realizes that **death** will haunt him throughout the war. Once he's settled into sentry duty in the trenches, he discovers that the war is at a standstill. All the men feel disillusioned by the wearisome dirty-work and absence of thrills.

After being relieved of trench duty, Jünger is sent to a remote village for officer training, where he forms enduring friendships. After training, in April 1915, Jünger's battalion is moved back to the front lines near Hattonchâtel, France, and Jünger finally gets his first taste of battle. While capturing French trenches, Jünger is hit in the leg with shrapnel—his first war wound. Nevertheless, he is horrified by the far worse suffering he witnesses in others. He is briefly evacuated to Germany for recovery, where he reflects that, contrary to his expectations, war is not just an adventure.

After his recovery, Jünger undergoes further training and becomes an ensign, specializing in moving small groups of soldiers across terrain. In September, he rejoins his regiment in Douchy, France. The front line surrounds nearby Monchy. Here, living in the section called C Sector, Jünger gets his first extensive taste of life in the trenches. It's often monotonous, but it also comes to feel like home as the trauma of shellfire and the back-breaking work of trench maintenance are interspersed with cozy camaraderie. He gets promoted to lieutenant during this time.

This relatively peaceful period doesn't last: by the spring of 1916, the Battle of the Somme (a major offensive on the Western Front) is looming. As artillery fire heats up, Jünger survives his first gas attacks and an attempted British invasion of C Sector. In late August, Jünger's platoon is transported to the front line outside of Combles, near the heart of the Somme. Jünger survives heavy artillery barrages but is briefly hospitalized after being struck by shrapnel. When he returns to the front, Jünger is assigned as a scouting officer. On just his second scouting mission, he is shot through both legs. He is depressed that he must stay in the hospital, missing his regiment's successful attack at St-Pierre-Vaast. After rejoining his regiment, he's awarded an Iron Cross.

In the spring of 1917, Jünger is briefly assigned to an observation post in the village of Fresnoy and then returns to the front line. With just 20 men, he overpowers a much larger group—the First Hariana Lancers, from India—and receives recognition for it. Next the regiment moves to the Flemish countryside. In the midst of a chaotic counterattack, Jünger is informed that his brother, Fritz, a newer recruit, was reported missing last night. Later, Jünger discovers his brother is injured nearby, and he arranges for Fritz's evacuation under heavy fire. He also leads an outnumbered group of soldiers in holding off a British advance. Later, outside the town of Regniéville, Jünger leads an unsuccessful raid on a French trench, though he is awarded another Iron Cross for his courage.

Next, Jünger is based in the Flemish village of Roeselare as an intelligence officer. He makes harrowing reconnaissance journeys across the shell-cratered countryside. Back on the front line, a bold attack against the British yields 200 captives, representing an advance on old methods of static trench-fighting.

In March 1918, Jünger is leading his men toward the front lines when they're hit head-on by shelling, and Jünger is heartbroken to lose several beloved comrades in particularly brutal circumstances. However, the losses fuel his desire for the coming offensive against the British. Soon after leaping into the enemy trench, however, a desperate British soldier shows Jünger a photograph of his family, and Jünger compassionately lets him go. After hours of merciless fighting, the Germans succeed in repelling the British somewhat, and Jünger rebounds enthusiastically despite sustaining both chest and head wounds. While recovering in the hospital, however, he begins to realize that Germany is actually losing the overall war effort.

In the summer of 1918, Jünger observes the growing reliance upon mechanized warfare, such as the use of tanks and airplanes. His strong will to fight also declines more and more as his sense of purpose falters. On August 23, Jünger takes part in his final assault, in the village of Favreuil. Shortly after the attack begins, he is shot in the lung just as the British overrun the village. Jünger is evacuated to Germany, where he spends his recovery recalling his many wounds (at least 14 total, with 20 scars) and spending time with his brother Fritz. While still in the hospital, he receives a telegram informing him that the Kaiser has awarded him the *pour le Mérite*, among highest possible military honors in the Kingdom of Prussia.

CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

Ernst Jünger – A young man who enlisted in the German Army shortly after the outbreak of World War I, Ernst Jünger adapted *Storm of Steel* from many volumes of wartime journals. Jünger was a member of the 73rd Infantry Regiment (part of the 111th Infantry Division), nicknamed "The Lions of Perthes," or "Les Gibraltars," in honor of the Hanoverian Guards from whom the regiment was descended (the Hanoverian Guards had defended Gibraltar against the French and Spanish in the late 1700s). Jünger is spirited, courageous, and a natural leader who often takes the initiative on raids, offensives, and in training newer recruits. Though his personal remarks are typically sparse, Jünger admires the bravery of comrades and enemies alike and generally treats both enemies and foreigners with respect. He loves observing nature, even amidst the brutality of war, and he also has a wry sense of humor which peppers his otherwise restrained narrative. Jünger

distinguishes himself early in the war and undergoes officer training after his first assignment of trench duty. He gets his first experience of battle—and his first of many wounds—at Les Eparges, France, in 1915. He is promoted to lieutenant while occupying the front lines at Monchy, France. In 1916, he is shot while working as a scouting officer and is awarded an Iron Cross. In 1917, he further distinguishes himself by leading a raid against the French and later helping capture more than 200 British. In 1918, the final year of the war, he sustains multiple injuries in different offensives and is evacuated to Germany, where he's awarded the *pour le Mérite*, one of the highest military honors. His brother Fritz also survives the war.

MINOR CHARACTERS

Fritz Jünger – Jünger's younger brother who joins his regiment. Jünger is devoted to him and, when Fritz is badly injured at the battle of Langemarck, he risks his own life to ensure Fritz is evacuated for medical care. He and Ernst are reunited in Germany near the end of the war.

Colonel von Oppen – Jünger's much-admired commander, whom he considers to be a "born leader." Von Oppen dies of cholera after being appointed to a battalion in Palestine in 1918.

Tebbe – A good friend of Jünger's, whom he meets while undergoing officer training in Recouvrence. On one memorable occasion, they go joyriding together in a stolen coach. Tebbe is later killed at the battle of Cambrai.

Clement – A good friend of Jünger's, whom he meets while undergoing officer training in Recouvrence. Clement is later killed at Monchy.

Otto Schmidt – Jünger's trusted orderly, who is killed by shellfire in 1918.

Schultz – Jünger's trusted fellow soldier and von Oppen's nephew, who dies in 1918.

Kloppman – A courageous older officer whom Jünger befriends at Regniéville. Kloppman is killed during an attempted raid on a French position.

Kius – Jünger's longtime friend and fellow soldier. He ends the war in British captivity.

Vinke – Jünger's orderly.

THEMES

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MANLINESS AND DUTY

By a conventional definition, Ernst Jünger could be considered one of the "manliest" figures in literature. At the end of *Storm of Steel*, Jünger's 1920 World War I memoir, he casually tallies his wartime injuries: 14 total, with 20 resulting scars. His appetite for battle is ceaseless, and his courage rarely falters. Yet his frequent citation of others' "manliness" is more complex than his personal exploits might suggest. Though he provides plenty of examples of men who rival his own prowess in battle, Jünger also tells stories of men who embody manliness in surprising ways, thereby arguing that "manliness" is more about one's faithfulness to duty than about boasting a long list of wartime injuries or medals.

Sometimes, manliness is a fairly traditional matter of courage under fire. Of an injured British soldier, Jünger remarks, "The sergeant practically had both legs sheared off by hand-grenade splinters; even so, with stoical calm, he kept his pipe clenched between his teeth to the end. This incident, like all our other encounters with the Britishers, left us pleasantly impressed with their bravery and manliness." In such instances, "manliness" is definitely associated, rather conventionally, with stoicism and one's ability to withstand pain. Toward the end of the war, Jünger comments on an occasion of meeting with a comrade over drinks: "Even if ten out of twelve men had fallen [in battle], the two survivors would surely meet over a glass on their first evening off, and drink a silent toast to their comrades, and jestingly talk over their shared experiences. There was in [such] men a quality that both emphasized the savagery of war and transfigured it at the same time: an objective relish for danger, the chevalieresque urge to prevail in battle. Over four years, the fire smelted an ever-purer, ever-bolder warriorhood." As many incidents throughout the book show, both luck and an element of self-selecting courage contribute to men's survival; the men who've survived for four gruesome years, therefore, often have both a certain "relish" for battle and a frank gratitude for their unlikely survival. In Jünger's estimation, then, manliness is "savage," but it's also self-aware and reflective, which shows that the traditional ideal of manliness needs something more than grit and fortitude to be worth embodying.

While never discounting traditional "manliness," Jünger just as often recognizes examples of masculinity that are unglamorous, unlikely, or otherwise inconspicuous—as long as the man in question faithfully performs his duty. While working at an observation post, Jünger is impressed by the work of the breakdown squad, who repair communications wires damaged during battle: "In these men, of whose activity I had been all but unaware hitherto, I now found a special type of unappreciated worker in the most perilous conditions. While most others strained to leave a shelled zone, the breakdown squad had to enter it calmly and professionally. Day and night, they went into

still-warm shell-holes to tie together the ends of two severed wires; their job was as dangerous as it was unglamorous." Jünger is quick to acknowledge that "manliness" isn't necessarily obvious or publicly recognized. Often, it simply involves the steadfast courage of doing one's job. Jünger recalls a comrade who later died in battle—a man "both shortsighted and hard of hearing, so that [...] he had to be pointed in the right direction by his men if he was to participate in the action in a meaningful way. Even so, brave puny men are always to be preferred to strong cowards[.]" In this instance, Jünger observes that even men with physical limitations, who are nevertheless keen to contribute as best they can, are preferable to outwardly robust yet less courageous men.

After losing many men in a horrible shelling, Jünger recalls, "One baby-faced fellow, who was mocked a few days ago by his comrades, and on exercises had wept under the weight of the big munitions boxes, was now loyally carrying them on our heavy way, having picked them up unasked in the crater. Seeing that [did me in]. I threw myself to the ground, and sobbed hysterically, while my men stood grimly about." This is practically the only occasion in the book where Jünger weeps. The young man, so recently mocked, quietly doing his duty under pressure is what affects Jünger so profoundly. This confirms that, for Jünger, a man's resoluteness in his duty is what counts far more than stereotypically "macho" characteristics.

On the way to the Battle of the Somme, Jünger sees a German soldier wearing a steel helmet. "'If a man falls,'" the man tells Jünger about what's waiting for them in the trenches, "'he's left to lie. No one can help. [...] Everyone knows this is about life and death.' Nothing was left in this voice but equanimity, apathy; fire had burned everything else out of it. It's men like that that you need for fighting." In this case, the ideal man is a warrior who is reconciled to the likelihood of his own death, not necessarily one who is burning for combat at every moment. For Jünger, war is ultimately a job, not something to be idealized. That's why even an "apathetic" man can be "manly"—he knows his duty and doesn't shrink from it.

MODERN WARFARE

World War I was a historical turning point in numerous ways, but one of the most notable is the transformations in the conduct of warfare. Because *Storm of Steel* is a straightforward recounting of Ernst Jünger's wartime experiences, he does not reflect at length on these historical trends. However, their broad outlines can be traced from Jünger's personal narrative. They include such things as the abandonment of pitched battles, the use of gas attacks, the destruction of civilian property, and the increased use of large machinery, like tanks and planes. By describing such turning points in the context of personal narrative, Jünger suggests that the changing nature of warfare is not abstract, but something that impacts the individual soldier and, increasingly, the world beyond the battlefield, in ominous ways.

Jünger observed some shifts in warfare firsthand, experiencing them as "new worlds" with personal impacts on the individual soldier. When a general prepares Jünger and his men for a massive offensive on the Western Front, they get their "first inkling of what was to be the Battle of the Somme. It marked the end of the first and mildest part of the war; thereafter, it was like embarking on a different one altogether. What we had, admittedly almost unbeknown to ourselves, been through had been the attempt to win a war by old-fashioned pitched battles [...] What confronted us now was a war of materiel of the most gigantic proportions. This war in turn was replaced towards the end of 1917 by mechanized warfare, though that was not given time fully to develop." In other words, the war is shifting from battle in which two sides encounter one another face to face, to war waged through the mobilization of massive amounts of weapons and ammunition (materiel), to battle that's conducted largely through mechanized means like artillery, tanks, and airplanes.

Before the Battle of the Somme, when Jünger chats with the first German soldier he's ever seen in a steel helmet, "he straightaway struck me as the denizen of a new and far harsher world. [...] [I] got from him a grey tale of days hunkered in craters, with no outside contact or communications lines, of incessant attacks, fields of corpses and crazy thirst, of the wounded left to die, and more of the same. [...] A few days had put their stamp on [him], who was to escort us into the realm of flame, setting him inexpressibly apart from us." The man's account is a prophesy of the grim realities of trench warfare, with its isolating and gruesome deprivations. It's a further indication of the shift from "old-fashioned pitched battles" to battle in which soldiers lob bombs and grenades across great distances, rarely seeing each other face to face.

Another ominous development is the emergence of chemical warfare. Jünger recalls suffering the effects of phosgene gas: "With weeping eyes, I stumbled back to the Vaux woods, plunging from one crater into the next, as I was unable to see anything through the misted visor of my gas mask. [...] Each time I blundered into sentries or troops who had lost their way, I had the icy sensation of conversing not with people, but with demons. We were all roving around in an enormous dump somewhere off the edge of the charted world." The eerie sensation of navigating in a gas mask, made necessary by the horrifying norms of modern warfare, is like stumbling into a new world where even brothers-in-arms feel like strangers to each other.

Other shifts in warfare aren't experienced firsthand, but Jünger describes certain things he witnesses as hints of greater transformations to come—things that will spill out of the experience of the soldier and into the civilian world. Later in the war, as Jünger surveys the destruction in civilian villages, he

remarks, "As far back as the Siegfried Line, every village was reduced to rubble […] As I say, the scenes were reminiscent of a madhouse […] They were also, we could see right away, bad for the men's morale and honour. Here, for the first time, I witnessed wanton destruction that I was later in life to see to excess; this is something that is unhealthily bound up with the economic thinking of our age, but it does more harm than good to the destroyer, and dishonours the soldier." This is as close as Jünger gets in his memoir to offering commentary on society at large. Here, he criticizes what he sees as disreputable, pointless looting and destruction. He doesn't elaborate on what he means by "the economic thinking of our age," but his comments suggest that war has come to be regarded as a total, zero-sum experience that impacts civilian as well as soldier, and, in the process, harms the psyche of the offending soldier as well as the civilian.

Near the war's end, Jünger examines a new tank and gets the sense of being on the cusp of something new, foreign, and sinister: "To be in the narrow turret of such a tank, going forward, with its tangle of rods and wires and poles, must have been extremely unpleasant as these colossuses, in efforts to outmaneuver the artillery, were forced to zigzag over the country like huge helpless beetles. I felt keen sympathy for the men in those fiery furnaces. Also, the countryside was dotted about with the skeletal wreckage of downed aeroplanes, an indication that machines were playing an ever-greater part on the battlefield." These glimpses were likewise prophetic, signaling realities that were only stirring to life in World War I but would come to dominate in the World War II, 20 years later.

It's worth noting that Jünger revised *Storm of Steel* many times over the years, and that the final edition was revised in 1961—long after the changes foreseen in Jünger's narrative had come to pass. It's entirely possible that Jünger inserts comments about mechanized warfare, for instance, with the full awareness of hindsight. Still, the memoir offers a unique perspective on such changes because they're discussed in the context of an individual soldier's experience, not as part of a disinterested historical analysis.

SUFFERING AND DEATH

One of the most memorable takeaways from *Storm of Steel* is the staggering amount of suffering and death that Jünger describes, and not just that of people close to him. Because *Storm of Steel* is adapted from Jünger's 16 volumes of wartime diaries, he obviously took great care to record these events in detail. Yet Jünger is restrained, not gratuitous, in his remembrance of death, and he often adds minimal, albeit powerful, comments on the effects such events had on him. Through his attentiveness to such details, Jünger suggests that proximity to suffering and death fundamentally changes a person, eventually pulling that person into its realm and making them a participant in it, not just a witness.

War transforms a person's perceptions, making one react differently to ordinary things than they've done before. Reflecting on the first big scares in his early war experience, Jünger remarks, "This was something that was to accompany us all through the war, that habit of jumping at any sudden and unexpected noise. Whether it was a train clattering past, a book falling to the floor, or a shout in the night—on each occasion, the heart would stop with a sense of mortal dread. It bore out the fact that for four years we lived in the shadow of death. The experience hit so hard in that dark country beyond consciousness, that every time there was a break with the usual, the porter Death would leap to the gates with hand upraised, like the figure above the dial on certain clock towers[.]" In short, death transfigures the ordinary. Once someone becomes aware of their proximity to death, even everyday noises become potential threats.

Exposure to suffering and death even begins to alter a person's typical reactions to the world around them. Jünger recalls that, on the way to the Battle of the Somme, "a driver split his thumb in the course of crank-starting his lorry. The sight of the wound almost made me ill, I have always been sensitive to such things. I mention this because it seems virtually unaccountable as I witnessed such terrible mutilation in the course of the following days. It's an example of the way in which one's response to an experience is actually largely determined by its context." This passage is remarkable because every chapter of *Storm of Steel* is filled with Jünger's stoic descriptions of horrifying injuries—yet the sight of a relatively mundane, non-critical injury sickens him, as he's "sensitive to such things." This passage suggests that the unique pressures of warfare really can have a transforming effect on an individual's psyche, steeling him against traumatic horrors witnessed daily, even while lifelong squeamishness remains unchanged.

In altering a person's view of the world, however, proximity to death actually goes on to fundamentally change a person's makeup in some way. There is, in fact, a "devilish" power at work in suffering that changes a person, even if they're merely witnessing it. The first time Jünger witnesses traumatic war injuries firsthand, he is momentarily undone: "This was the home of the great god Pain, and for the first time I looked through a devilish chink into the depths of his realm. […] I lost my head completely. Ruthlessly, I barged past everyone on my path, before finally […] climbing out of the hellish crush of the trench […] Like a bolting horse, I rushed through dense undergrowth, across paths and clearings, till I collapsed in a copse by the [road]." Jünger isn't ashamed to admit his terror in the face of extreme suffering (even that of others, not his own). It's something beyond human comprehension—a realm of "devilish" gods, something that reduces even the bravest person to an almost animal-like, irrational flight.

After inhabiting this "realm" for long enough, a person becomes

in some way "demonic" himself. By the time he has become seasoned in battle, Jünger experiences a unique battlefield "excitement" that he has experienced nowhere else in his life. The smell of corpses hangs in the air, and "this heavy sweetish atmosphere was not merely disgusting; it also […] brought about an almost visionary excitement, that otherwise only the extreme nearness of death is able to produce. Here, and really only here, I was to observe that there is a quality of dread that feels as unfamiliar as a foreign country. In moments when I felt it, I experienced no fear as such but a kind of exalted, almost demoniacal lightness; often attended by fits of laughter I was unable to repress." Jünger makes no effort to explain this "foreign" quality. Indeed, it seems to defy human explanation: it's repugnant, "demoniacal," and at the same time bizarrely joyful. It seems that, in Jünger's view, a person's proximity to death renders him something other than human, albeit briefly.

If its unshrinking depiction of violence is *Storm of Steel*'s most striking characteristic, then perhaps the second most striking is its reticence in evaluating said violence. Throughout the book, and even after he describes the strange hilarity that sometimes befalls soldiers, Jünger is mainly concerned with reporting his experiences, not philosophizing. Arguably, though, Jünger's spare descriptions of death's "demonic" power over people speak volumes. War undermines one's humanity; perhaps he feels that little more needs to be said.

FOREIGNERS, ENEMIES, AND EMPATHY

While *Storm of Steel* is tightly focused on the experiences of Ernst Jünger and his fellow German soldiers, other people—like British and French soldiers, and French and Flemish civilians in occupied lands—make frequent appearances, too. In most respects, Jünger seems to be a product of his early 20th-century nationalistic culture in his attitudes about distancing himself from conquered people and combatants. But his stories of encounters with non-Germans also shed more light on his individual character than perhaps anything else in the memoir. By portraying himself not just as a soldier among soldiers, but also as a human being finding common ground and empathizing with others, Jünger portrays himself as a sympathetic figure, suggesting than remaining in touch with one's humanity is actually indispensable for a good soldier.

In one sense, Jünger maintains a careful distance from foreigners and enemies. At other times, however, two opposing sides are able to find common ground. As the German army moves through various destroyed villages, Jünger is not insensitive to the destruction he sees: "The desolation and the profound silence […] were heightened by the sorry impression of devastation. Ripped haversacks, broken rifles, scraps of cloth, counterpointed grotesquely with children's toys, shell fuses, deep craters from explosions, bottles, harvest implements, shredded books, battered household gear […] all that, with a half-buried communication trench running through it, and all suffused with the smell of burning and decay. Sad thoughts are apt to sneak up on the warrior in such a locale, when he thinks of those who only recently led their lives in tranquillity." Jünger pointedly juxtaposes implements of war with items, like toys and books, from peacetime life. Even a "warrior" thinks about those whose suffering is silently pictured in such locations—yet, it's also a warrior's prerogative not to dwell on such things. While tragic, it's also not his problem.

Distance between different sides is not absolute, but it always makes relationships complex. Jünger describes friendly acquaintances made while occupying foreign territories: "Before long, all of us had struck up our various friendships and relationships, and on our afternoons off we could be seen striding through the countryside, making for this or that farmstead, to take a seat in a sparkling clean kitchen round one of the low stoves, on whose round tops a big pot of coffee was kept going. We chatted away in a blend of Flemish and Lower Saxon." This appreciative description shows that occupiers and occupied citizens can share space peacefully, spend pleasant hours around the table, and even converse in linguistically similar tongues. These apparently genuine, warm relations nevertheless wouldn't have happened if Germany weren't waging war and occupying other countries—showing the inherently complicated nature of wartime relations.

Recognizing that there is humanity to be found on both sides of any given conflict, Jünger's openness to others also prompts him to treat them with respect, even sparing the life of an enemy on at least one occasion. Jünger is frank and forthright about his opinion of the enemy, recognizing their common soldierly status: "Throughout the war, it was always my endeavour to view my opponent without animus, and to form an opinion of him as a man on the basis of the courage he showed. I would always try and seek him out in combat and kill him, and I expected nothing else from him. But never did I entertain mean thoughts of him. When prisoners fell into my hands, later on, I felt responsible for their safety, and would always do everything in my power for them." Part of the warrior's ethic, in Jünger's view, is to respect a fellow soldier for the way he comports himself on the battlefield and not to fight out of a sense of hatred. Soldiers know soldiers, in other words.

Jünger shows compassion for civilians, recognizing their common humanity. While quartered with a family in a Flemish village, "the town was once again bombed. I […] switched on my torch to settle the nerves of the little girl, who had been screaming ever since an explosion had knocked out the light. Here was proof again of man's need for home. In spite of the huge fear these women had in the face of such danger, yet they clung fast to the ground which at any moment might bury them." He never reflects at length on such people; like his

comments on manliness or death, Jünger is restrained in his assessment of other people. But he doesn't withhold his admiration for these women who remain steadfast in the face of an imminent threat—rather like soldiers holding their ground. Again, he sees something in these foreigners that resonates with his own view of the world.

Finally, Jünger's recognition of others' humanity even prompts him to show mercy at times. Near the end of the war, Jünger finds himself holding his pistol to the temple of a British soldier: "With a plaintive sound, he reached into his pocket, not to pull out a weapon, but a photograph which he held up to me. I saw him on it, surrounded by numerous family, all standing on a terrace. It was a plea from another world." After letting him go, "That one man of all often appeared in my dreams. I hope that meant he got to see his homeland again." Again, Jünger tersely recognizes the humanity of his British counterpart. Throughout the war, he never hesitates to kill, but in this fleeting instance, the photograph momentarily transplants the two men in the world beyond the war, and this shared moment prompts Jünger to let the man go.

Though the scene with the desperate British soldier is moving, it's also not completely surprising—Jünger's appreciative and sometimes compassionate appraisals of foreigners and the enemy serve to prepare the reader for this memorable encounter. As a whole, Jünger's attitudes toward others make him a fairly sympathetic figure throughout; he is realistic in his loyalty to his country, but not triumphalist, and never wantonly cruel.

THE COMPLEX REALITY OF WAR

Storm of Steel is an undeniably war-ridden book. Jünger enthusiastically chronicles his experiences, from the time he's a timid young soldier in 1914, to his days as a jaded veteran near the end of the war in 1918. Yet it is hard to call this memoir a celebration of war. In fact, careful attention to Jünger's narrative shows that, while he remains steadfast and untiring in his duty, there's little trace of glamor in his view of combat. Rather, he views it as an unsettling experience that has room for extremes of suffering, hilarity, domesticity, and regret. By avoiding heavy-handed pronouncements and simply chronicling his varied experiences in this way, Jünger suggests that war can't be limited to abstract ideals, but must be understood in terms of human experience, which defies categorization.

At the outset of World War I, a naïve Jünger and his fellows look upon war as an adventure. They even have a romantic outlook on war: "We had come from lecture halls, school desks and factory workbenches [...] Grown up in an age of security, we shared a yearning for danger, for the experience of the extraordinary. We were enraptured by war. We had set out in a rain of flowers, in a drunken atmosphere of blood and roses. Surely the war had to supply us with what we wanted; the great, the overwhelming, the hallowed experience." The young men desire something from war—it owes them something, in fact—an almost mystical experience.

After being shelled in a French village on their first day, however, the men find that war shows its true nature. "War had shown its claws, and stripped off its mask of cosiness. It was all so strange, so impersonal. We had barely begun to think about the enemy, that mysterious, treacherous being somewhere. This event, so far beyond anything we had experienced, made such a powerful impression on us that it was difficult to understand what had happened. It was like a ghostly manifestation in broad daylight." Very quickly, the young soldiers have been disillusioned regarding the hideous nature of war. Far from catering to their youthful whims, war is "impersonal," uncanny, and uncontrollable.

As Jünger becomes further acquainted with war as a mysterious, unpredictable force, he finds it reflected in his own experience in uncategorizable ways. Jünger frequently juxtaposes the horrible chaos of war with the unaccountable emotions of young men under the pressures of life and death: "Casualties huddled by the roadside, whimpering for water, prisoners carrying stretchers came panting back [...] On either side, shells spattered the soft ground, heavy boughs came crashing down. A dead horse lay across the middle of the path, with giant wounds, its steaming entrails beside it. In among the great, bloody scenes there was a wild, unsuspected hilarity." In the midst of suffering, vivid images of death, and the ongoing threat of destruction, there is nothing to explain such "hilarity"—it's a further expression of war defying neat categorization.

Another example of this defiance of categories is that, even in the nightmarish trenches, a kind of homey domesticity often prevails: "We sat on long summer evenings cheerfully on its clay ramparts, while the balmy air wafted the sounds of our busy hammering and banging and our native songs in the direction of the enemy; we plunged over beams and chopped wire while Death with his steel club assaulted our trenches and slothful smoke slunk out of our shattered clay ramparts. Many times, the colonel wanted to transfer us out to a quieter section of the regimental line, but each time the company begged him as one man to let us remain in C Sector." Such poetic passages bely the ugliness of war, yet for Jünger, they are a frequent expression of the affectionate comradeship, an attachment to specific people and places, that characterizes war. Being a soldier is not simply a question of abstract, romanticized ideals.

Jünger often recalls a young British soldier he shot in one of his last major battles: "Outside [...] lay my British soldier, little more than a boy, who had been hit in the temple. He lay there, looking quite relaxed. I forced myself to look closely at him. It wasn't a case of 'you or me' any more. I often thought back on him; and more with the passing of the years. The state, which relieves us of our responsibility, cannot take away our remorse; and we

must exercise it. Sorrow, regret, pursued me deep into my dreams." Jünger recognizes that, according to the logic of war, he was justified in killing this "boy." Yet, at the same time, his sorrow is genuine and lasting, and something he's not at liberty to ignore. Not long after this, Jünger finds his appetite for war perceptibly decreasing. As Jünger comes to terms with the probability that Germany will lose the war, "there crept over me a mood I hadn't known before. […] Things were less dazzlingly distinct. And I felt that the purpose with which I had gone out to fight had been used up, and no longer held. The war posed new, deeper puzzles. It was a strange time altogether." No longer a field for the enactment of principle or purpose, war is now a "puzzle," one that Jünger doesn't clearly resolve in the book. Rather, he offers his whole experience as an illustration that war is never quite what one wants or expects it to be.

SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in **teal text** throughout the Summary and Analysis sections of this LitChart.

STEEL

Steel symbolizes the emergence of mechanized warfare during World War I, particularly the heightened destructiveness and lethality that such warfare creates. As an incredibly durable metal, steel was used to create many of the technologies and equipment that set World War I apart as a distinctly modern war—one that was unprecedented in terms of its scale and detached style of warfare. In August 1916, Jünger is impressed when he sees a soldier wearing a steel helmet for the first time, and the soldier's appearance symbolically heralds a harsher phase of the war, in which shell splinters and shrapnel cause death and disfiguring injuries. Near the war's end, Jünger refers to the British "storm of steel" as an overwhelming force of both weaponry and manpower that ultimately overcomes German resources. Thus, steel comes to represent the cold, unfeeling reality of the war and the dizzying "storm" of the modern battlefield.

DEATH

Throughout *Storm of Steel*, Jünger often refers to Death in personified terms. Death has an uncanny, unpredictable character, symbolizing mortality's defiance of human control. During his first morning on the front lines, Jünger witnesses other soldiers being killed by shellfire and instantly becomes jumpy around any loud noise, realizing that Death will "leap […] with hand upraised" at unexpected moments for the duration of the war. This brush with Death disabuses him of detached, romantic views of warfare. The proximity of Death even causes unaccountable hilarity, eroding one's humanity, amidst the hysteria of battle. During his last assault, "Death's hand" briefly grips Jünger when he is shot, but he ultimately survives, suggesting that Death doesn't inevitably triumph. However, the harrowing war narrative demonstrates that avoidance of death owes as much to luck as to human cleverness or skill.

QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Penguin edition of *Storm of Steel* published in 2004.

In the Chalk Trenches of Champagne Quotes

We had come from lecture halls, school desks and factory workbenches, and over the brief weeks of training, we had bonded together into one large and enthusiastic group. Grown up in an age of security, we shared a yearning for danger, for the experience of the extraordinary. We were enraptured by war. We had set out in a rain of flowers, in a drunken atmosphere of blood and roses. Surely the war had to supply us with what we wanted; the great, the overwhelming, the hallowed experience. We thought of it as manly, as action, a merry duelling party on flowered, blood-bedewed meadows. […] Anything to participate, not to have to stay at home!

Related Characters: Ernst Jünger (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 5

Explanation and Analysis

In this quote, Jünger describes his and his fellow soldiers' arrival on the Western Front in 1914. He summarizes the untried soldiers' romantic outlook on the coming war—having grown up in peacetime, they share a naïve longing for something completely different. This longing reflects Jünger's personal history, which included a rebellious stint in the French Foreign Legion when he grew tired of his privileged home life. Although *Storm of Steel* has sometimes been derided by critics as a nationalistic idealization of war, this quote actually throws that assumption into question. For one thing, it is quickly followed by an account of an unexpected shell strike, which kills more than a dozen bystanders and snaps the young soldiers out of their comfortable illusions. The "drunken atmosphere of blood and roses" therefore contrasts with the stark, sobering reality that death lurks everywhere on the Front. The quote should be read, then, as containing an ironic note, establishing a contrast between the sheltered

boys who arrive on the Front and the hardened men they will become as soldiers.

Douchy and Monchy Quotes

❝ The desolation and the profound silence, sporadically broken by the crump of shells, were heightened by the sorry impression of devastation. Ripped haversacks, broken rifles, scraps of cloth, counterpointed grotesquely with children's toys, shell fuses, deep craters from explosions, bottles, harvest implements, shredded books, battered household gear, holes whose gaping darkness betrayed the presence of basements, where the bodies of the unlucky inhabitants of the houses were gnawed by the particularly assiduous swarms of rats; [...] trenches dug through the ravaged gardens, in among sprouting bulbs of onions, wormwood, rhubarb, narcissus, buried under weeds; on the neighbouring fields grain barns, through whose roofs the grain was already sprouting; all that, with a half-buried communication trench running through it, and all suffused with the smell of burning and decay. Sad thoughts are apt to sneak up on the warrior in such a locale, when he thinks of those who only recently led their lives in tranquillity.

Related Characters: Ernst Jünger (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 39

Explanation and Analysis

In this quote, Jünger describes the devastation he witnesses in the captured French village of Monchy, previously a sleepy hamlet, now virtually decimated by the German-French encounter. He takes special note of the jumbled-together implements of war and peacetime life: discarded weapons alongside children's toys, books, and farming tools—things marking an ordinary human existence—among the impressions left by explosive shells. This morose collection symbolizes the sudden eruption of mechanized war in civilian life, interrupting the long-unvaried rhythms of rural life with a greater destructiveness than older methods of warfare ever did. Trenches meander through town property. Even more horrifying, the remains of trapped inhabitants linger in homes. A certain irrepressible life persists, with wild growth overtaking gardens and structures. Overall, however, the sobering picture reminds Jünger not only of modern warfare's reach, but of his continuing disillusionment of the notion that war is just about heroism and adventure. It overflows into the lives of noncombatants, prompting the regret even of those like Jünger himself, who are complicit in the waging of such war. Jünger is not inclined to editorial remarks about the war, but scenes like this show his sensitivity to its monstrous effects.

Daily Life in the Trenches Quotes

❝ Throughout the war, it was always my endeavour to view my opponent without animus, and to form an opinion of him as a man on the basis of the courage he showed. I would always try and seek him out in combat and kill him, and I expected nothing else from him. But never did I entertain mean thoughts of him. When prisoners fell into my hands, later on, I felt responsible for their safety, and would always do everything in my power for them.

Related Characters: Ernst Jünger (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 58

Explanation and Analysis

This quote comes in the midst of Jünger's account of "ordinary" life in the trenches near Monchy, France, in the early part of the war. He has just described an incident when he was required to conduct negotiations with a British officer, and now he reflects on his general attitudes toward "the enemy." This is a somewhat unusual moment in Jünger's narrative, as he doesn't offer much direct commentary throughout *Storm of Steel*, preferring to relate specific events rather than philosophize about war. However, the rare event of a face-to-face encounter with an opponent prompts him to explain his outlook on combat. For Jünger, combat is not based on hatred or aggression, but a sense of duty (it's kill or be killed) and honor (personal courage garners respect). That "honorable" standard extends to enemy prisoners as well. This quote is noteworthy both because of its insight into Jünger's view of "manliness"—a quality he grants even to the soldiers he's fighting against—and its insight into a historical turning point. Jünger's gentlemanly tone is suggestive of an age in which personal contact between soldiers was more common. Even here, such contact is in its twilight, as World War I saw the rise of trench warfare and the emergence of mechanized modes of warfare that kept soldiers at a greater distance from one another and thus encouraged a more detached and dehumanized style of combat.

The Beginning of the Battle of the Somme Quotes

❝ These moments of nocturnal prowling leave an indelible impression. Eyes and ears are tensed to the maximum, the rustling approach of strange feet in the tall grass is an unutterably menacing thing. Your breath comes in shallow bursts; you have to force yourself to stifle any panting or wheezing. There is a little mechanical click as the safety-catch of your pistol is taken off; the sound cuts straight through your nerves. Your teeth are grinding on the fuse-pin of the hand-grenade. The encounter will be short and murderous. You tremble with two contradictory impulses: the heightened awareness of the huntsman, and the terror of the quarry. You are a world to yourself, saturated with the appalling aura of the savage landscape.

Related Characters: Ernst Jünger (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 71

Explanation and Analysis

In this quote, Jünger describes his experience going on a patrol across no-man's-land—the dangerous territory between the German and British trenches—in an attempt to take a British prisoner. It effectively describes the soldiers' experience of utmost tension, with their senses primed and fear at its height. On a patrol like this, one knows that within a few minutes, one will either be victorious, wounded, or dead. The quote is remarkable in that it captures the mindset of a soldier under extreme duress—one of the first accounts from World War I to do this in such precise, unrelenting detail. It especially captures the unique savagery of no-man's-land in the darkness, where one is inevitably as much "huntsman" as "quarry." Notable in Jünger's description is the candidness of his fear. He never downplays the dread and terror of war in his descriptions of himself or other soldiers—in fact, he sees such fear as part of one's duty and adherence to that duty is the pinnacle of a soldier's manliness, as Jünger understands it.

Guillemont Quotes

❝ He was the first German soldier I saw in a steel helmet, and he straightaway struck me as the denizen of a new and far harsher world. […] The impassive features under the rim of the steel helmet and the monotonous voice accompanied by the noise of the battle made a ghostly impression on us. A few days had put their stamp on the runner, who was to escort us into the realm of flame, setting him inexpressibly apart from us.

"If a man falls, he's left to lie. No one can help. No one knows if he'll return alive. Every day we're attacked, but they won't get through. Everyone knows this is about life and death."

Nothing was left in this voice but equanimity, apathy; fire had burned everything else out of it. It's men like that that you need for fighting.

Related Characters: Ernst Jünger (speaker)

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 92

Explanation and Analysis

When Jünger and his men arrive at the front to join the Battle of the Somme, they're greeted by a runner who is emblematic of what they're about to experience in combat. Different from the soldiers they've met before, the man wears steel—signifying that they are about to embark on a harsher phase of the war, characterized by heavier artillery and ever more relentless shelling. In sparing words, the runner gets across what fighting on the frontline is like: the men must hold the line to the death, even as they watch comrades fall. Though these comments make a foreboding impression on Jünger, he also has an admiring reaction. The "apathy" in the man's voice does not detract from Jünger's idealization of him as a soldier. In fact, in Jünger's view, it's what makes him an effective fighter—everything but determination has been "burned out" of him. Fighting, then, is not about vengeance, or about any particular relish for the activities of war. For Jünger, it's simply about a steadfast resolve to get the job done. This makes the man in steel both a masculine ideal, according to the code Jünger espouses in the book, and a herald of the emergence of modern warfare.

Over the ruins, as over all the most dangerous parts of the terrain, lay a heavy smell of death, because the fire was so intense that no one could bother with the corpses. You really did have to run for your life in these places, and when I caught the smell of it as I ran, I was hardly surprised - it belonged to there. Moreover, this heavy sweetish atmosphere was not merely disgusting; it also, in association with the piercing fogs of gunpowder, brought about an almost visionary excitement, that otherwise only the extreme nearness of death is able to produce.

Here, and really only here, I was to observe that there is a quality of dread that feels as unfamiliar as a foreign country. In moments when I felt it, I experienced no fear as such but a kind of exalted, almost demoniacal lightness; often attended by fits of laughter I was unable to repress.

Related Characters: Ernst Jünger (speaker)

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 93

Explanation and Analysis

In this quote Jünger describes the experience of being led through a dangerous bottleneck on the way to his unit's position on the front lines at the Battle of the Somme. The shocking imagery of the passage conveys Jünger's own shock and dread as he runs through a realm of abandoned corpses, acutely aware of the odor of death, the proximity of battle, and the likelihood that, at any moment, he could be among the dead. He also describes a "visionary excitement," which he touches on elsewhere in the book but always seems powerless to explain—an unexpected, uncontrollable hilarity that overcomes a soldier in moments of extreme stress. Jünger characterizes this hilarity as "demoniacal lightness," suggesting that when one is trapped in such a realm of death, one inevitably takes on certain inhuman traits—perhaps as a coping mechanism in the face of one's own mortality. This also connects to Jünger's ongoing examination of the unclassifiable nature of warfare. A soldier experiencing morbid laughter while clinging to life is an example of the many ways that war, and especially the horrors of modern war, stretches a person beyond familiar categories and tests one's humanity.

The Woods of St-Pierre-Vaast Quotes

With weeping eyes, I stumbled back to the Vaux woods, plunging from one crater into the next, as I was unable to see anything through the misted visor of my gas mask. With the extent and inhospitableness of its spaces, it was a night of eerie solitude. Each time I blundered into sentries or troops who had lost their way, I had the icy sensation of conversing not with people, but with demons. We were all roving around in an enormous dump somewhere off the edge of the charted world.

Related Characters: Ernst Jünger (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 114

Explanation and Analysis

Jünger's scouting mission at St-Pierre-Vaast, while ostensibly less perilous than his time in the trenches, turns out to be fraught with dangers. He encounters one such peril while struggling to find his way back through swampy woods when a phosgene gas attack hits. World War I marked the first large-scale use of chemical weapons in the form of inhaled gases. The damage caused by such gases actually accounted for less than 1 percent of wartime fatalities, but as Jünger's passage shows, the threat of gas took a considerable psychological toll on soldiers. Experiments with gases were actually initiated by the Germans, beginning with chlorine, then progressing to the deadlier phosgene by the end of 1915. Phosgene is an industrial reagent which can cause suffocation and can potentially cause a host of long-term health effects. Jünger's description of surviving a gas attack, hurrying through the woods in his misted-up mask, is especially striking because he describes it as wandering in an alien environment—as if this new frontier in warfare has disoriented everyone so much that even fellow soldiers can't recognize one another. The use of gases in chemical warfare was prohibited by the Geneva Protocol in 1925, but Fritz Haber, the same chemist who developed these weapons, contributed to another horrifying development in modern warfare—the use of gases like Zyklon B to kill prisoners in World War II concentration camps.

Retreat from the Somme Quotes

❝ As far back as the Siegfried Line, every village was reduced to rubble, every tree chopped down, every road undermined, every well poisoned, every basement blown up or booby-trapped, every rail unscrewed, every telephone wire rolled up, everything burnable burned; in a word, we were turning the country that our advancing opponents would occupy into a wasteland.

As I say, the scenes were reminiscent of a madhouse, and the effect of them was similar: half funny, half repellent. They were also, we could see right away, bad for the men's morale and honour. Here, for the first time, I witnessed wanton destruction that I was later in life to see to excess; this is something that is unhealthily bound up with the economic thinking of our age, but it does more harm than good to the destroyer, and dishonours the soldier.

Related Characters: Ernst Jünger (speaker)

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 128

Explanation and Analysis

In this quote Jünger describes what he witnessed as he traveled through war-ravaged areas to the front line: civilian towns looted, destroyed, and even booby-trapped to harm the approaching enemy. The destruction, as Jünger describes it, is manifold. Obviously, it wrecks the homes of former villagers, effectively erasing their histories from the landscape. It deprives the enemy of whatever shelter they might find there. But, most interestingly, Jünger dwells on the cost that such destruction exacts from those who cause it. He believes that looting and destroying "dishonors" those who do it as well as those whom they are doing it to. Jünger seldom offers much commentary in his book, and his remark about seeing "wanton destruction" later in life confirms that these particular remarks were probably added in one of the book's later revisions. Though it's not entirely clear what Jünger means by "the economic thinking of our age," Jünger was later critical of what he saw as excesses of capitalism in Germany. Here, he seems to regard wartime habits like looting as an expression of a society that is becoming too entrenched in materialism, which, unchecked, can spill over into vengeful destruction against the innocent. It's a manifestation of a lack of empathy which Jünger despises, seeing it as an offense against the honor of the soldier.

In the Village of Fresnoy Quotes

❝ Such libations after a successfully endured engagement are among the fondest memories an old warrior may have. Even if ten out of twelve men had fallen, the two survivors would surely meet over a glass on their first evening off, and drink a silent toast to their comrades, and jestingly talk over their shared experiences. There was in these men a quality that both emphasized the savagery of war and transfigured it at the same time: an objective relish for danger, the chevalieresque urge to prevail in battle. Over four years, the fire smelted an ever-purer, ever-bolder warriorhood.

Related Characters: Ernst Jünger (speaker)

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 140

Explanation and Analysis

This quote gives further insight into Jünger's view of manliness, or the ideal warrior. He is discussing the pleasures of veteran camaraderie, as seasoned warriors enjoy drinking and sharing stories of shared exploits. What's interesting about Jünger's view is his perspective on survivorship. That is, on one hand, the unabashed "relish for danger" he embodied as a young recruit has not been driven away by experience; "the chevalieresque" (knight-like) desire for victory is unquenched. In fact, surviving this long in the war only seems to deepen and intensify those desires. On the other hand, soldiers who've survived this long, in contrast to young recruits, are painfully acquainted with the cost of war. This is what Jünger means by the "savagery of war" being "transfigured"—such soldiers know that their survival isn't solely a matter of skill, but of fortune as well. The result is a soldier who is perhaps hardier than ever and emboldened to take greater risks since they have endured so much already. This is a good description of Jünger himself, and it's not surprising that he savored such elite brotherhood with like-minded souls. It's also a fitting summary of the complex emotions called up by a many-faceted experience like war.

Against Indian Opposition Quotes

In the evenings, I took a stick out of the corner and strolled along narrow footpaths that went winding through the hilly landscape. The neglected fields were full of flowers, and the smell grew headier and wilder by the day. Occasional trees stood beside the paths, under which a farmworker might have taken his ease in peacetime, bearing white or pink or deep-red blossoms, magical apparitions in the solitude. Nature seemed to be pleasantly intact, and yet the war had given it a suggestion of heroism and melancholy; its almost excessive blooming was even more radiant and narcotic than usual.

It's easier to go into battle against such a setting than in a cold and wintry scene. The simple soul is convinced here that his life is deeply embedded in nature, and that his death is no end.

Related Characters: Ernst Jünger (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 143

Explanation and Analysis

In this quote, Jünger describes the country walks he enjoyed during a particular rest period. It's notable because of its connection to Jünger's youth—he had always relished nature and even participated in a youth movement called the *Wandervogel*, which encouraged young people to spend time enjoying the outdoors rather than occupying themselves with more materialistic pursuits. This also brings out the complexity of Jünger's own character: he loves the rigors of war as genuinely as he loves the solitary beauties of the countryside. He's not unaware of the irony himself; he observes that nature seems to put on an ever-more irrepressible display in light of the barren devastation war brings in its wake. Such beauty, in fact, reassures the sensitive warrior, even steeling him for the ugliness of war by reminding him of his connectedness to the cycles of nature. This is another example of the complexity of the warrior psyche, and indeed of war itself, in Jünger's mind.

Langemarck Quotes

My steel helmet pulled down over my brow, staring at the road, whose stones shot sparks when iron fragments flew off them, I chewed my pipe and tried to talk myself into feeling brave. Curious thoughts flashed through my brain. For instance, I thought hard about a French popular novel called *Le vautour de la Sierra* that had fallen into my hands in Cambrai. Several times I murmured a phrase of Ariosto's: 'A great heart feels no dread of approaching death, whenever it may come, so long as it be honourable.' That produced a pleasant kind of intoxication, of the sort that one experiences, maybe, on a rollercoaster. When the shells briefly abated, I heard fragments of the lovely song of 'The Black Whale at Askalon' coming from the man next to me, and I thought my friend Kius must have gone mad. But everyone has his own particular idiosyncratic method.

Related Characters: Ernst Jünger (speaker)

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 171

Explanation and Analysis

This quote describes Jünger's mindset on the eve of the Battle of Langemarck, which was an Allied attack during 1917's Third Battle of Ypres in Belgium. It provides rare insight into Jünger's emotional state, about which he is typically fairly restrained. He has to "talk [himself] into feeling brave," showing that despite his apparently unflappable demeanor, Jünger does have to fight for courage on the cusp of battle; his commitment to duty, while steadfast, is not automatic, but consciously cultivated. His personality also comes through in that, even at this tense moment, his thoughts fall to his recent reading. Notably, he draws upon the Italian Renaissance-era poet, Ludovico Ariosto, who, among other topics, wrote about war between the Franks and Saracens in his 1516 epic *Orlando Furioso*. His favorite Ariosto quote, valorizing the "honorable" death, is not a surprise, since it's consistent with Jünger's view of equanimity in the face of death as befitting the ideal soldier. By contrast, his friend Kius's song, "Im schwarzen Walfisch zu Askalon," is a beloved German drinking song. Jünger wryly observes that people have their own ways of dealing with impending trauma, whether sophisticated or not.

Flanders Again Quotes

> In the evening, the town was once again bombed. I went down into the cellar, where the women were huddled trembling in a corner, and switched on my torch to settle the nerves of the little girl, who had been screaming ever since an explosion had knocked out the light. Here was proof again of man's need for home. In spite of the huge fear these women had in the face of such danger, yet they clung fast to the ground which at any moment might bury them.

Related Characters: Ernst Jünger (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 194

Explanation and Analysis

Here Jünger describes his experiences of boarding with a household in a Belgian village: two women and an orphaned girl they've taken in. Though Jünger is largely accustomed to bombing raids by this time, he feels solidarity with the civilian household, especially with the frightened little girl. He sees this makeshift family as a symbol of a greater human impulse—the desire for a home, and for rootedness in those tangible things that remind them of their humanity. In this way, they're rather like Jünger as he portrays himself throughout Storm of Steel: steadfast in the face of danger while also fighting to stay connected to those things, like literature and nature, that he sees as part of his identity. In fact, the women's tenacity is reminiscent of men sheltering in the trenches, "[clinging] fast to the ground which [...] might bury them." This is a high compliment coming from Jünger, and also exemplifies his general compassion toward foreigners and civilians.

> It was the first time in the war that I'd come across an example of a man acting up, not out of cowardice, but obviously out of complete indifference. Although such indifference was more commonly seen in the last years of the war, its display in action remained very unusual, as battle brings men together, whereas inactivity separates them. In a battle, you stand under external pressures. It was on the march, surrounded by columns of men moving out of the battle, that the erosion of the war ethos showed itself most nakedly.

Related Characters: Ernst Jünger (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 195

Explanation and Analysis

Jünger describes an occasion when he had to deal with an uncooperative officer. In the midst of heavy fire, Jünger and a scouting group have been searching for the location where the regimental staff are to be relieved that morning. Here, he comes across this officer idling in a doorway. When the man shrugs noncommittally, Jünger holds his pistol in the man's face until he gets the information he needs. He explains what produces such apathy, also giving insight into the "war ethos," as he puts it. In short, battle draws men together in a common purpose. When that shared purpose is lost, however, soldiers can become unmotivated and erratic. In fact, Jünger sees a sharp difference in behavior just between the battlefield and the outskirts of the front, as seen here when they lethargic man has to be forced to make himself useful. This episode sheds light on Jünger's view of soldierly duty, which he always associates with one's behavior under pressure rather than one's external rank. Likewise, it further illustrates the strain that war places on soldiers' minds, such that motivation can be difficult to summon in the absence of the demands of battle.

The Great Battle Quotes

> I had to leave the unlucky ones to the one surviving stretcher-bearer in order to lead the handful of unhurt men who had gathered around me from that dreadful place. Half an hour ago at the head of a full battle-strength company, I was now wandering around a labyrinth of trenches with a few, completely demoralized men. One baby-faced fellow, who was mocked a few days ago by his comrades, and on exercises had wept under the weight of the big munitions boxes, was now loyally carrying them on our heavy way, having picked them up unasked in the crater. Seeing that did for me. I threw myself to the ground, and sobbed hysterically, while my men stood grimly about.

Related Characters: Ernst Jünger (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 226

Explanation and Analysis

This quote describes one of the most devasting moments of Jünger's war experience. While the unit is being led to their place on the line for a decisive battle, a shell explodes right in the midst of them, killing and maiming some of his most beloved men. Some of the injured men even clung to Jünger,

begging for help, but there was nothing he could do but entrust them to the medics and continue leading the survivors into the fray. He now describes the disorientation and grief he feels in the aftermath of such a shocking attack. The moment that breaks Jünger emotionally is particularly telling: the young man who'd been mocked as a weakling now quietly takes initiative to serve his comrades, and Jünger is overwhelmed by this example of duty under pressure. In light of Jünger's view of manliness and duty—that they're not necessarily about external traits, but about how one comports oneself in the face of danger—this reaction is not surprising, and perhaps says more about Jünger's character than any other moment in the book.

> A bloody scene with no witnesses was about to happen. It was a relief to me, finally, to have the foe in front of me and within reach. I set the mouth of the pistol at the man's temple - he was too frightened to move - while my other fist grabbed hold of his tunic, feeling medals and badges of rank. An officer; he must have held some command post in these trenches. With a plaintive sound, he reached into his pocket, not to pull out a weapon, but a photograph which he held up to me. I saw him on it, surrounded by numerous family, all standing on a terrace.
>
> It was a plea from another world. Later, I thought it was blind chance that I let him go and plunged onward. That one man of all often appeared in my dreams. I hope that meant he got to see his homeland again.

Related Characters: Ernst Jünger (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 233

Explanation and Analysis

This remarkable encounter occurs as part of a major offensive near the end of the war. Just moments before, Jünger had charged into the British trench, longing to kill as many enemy soldiers as he could—only to be brought up short by the officer's plea. What Jünger calls "a plea from another world" is notably different from past interactions with enemy officers; while he's generally respected his opponents, Jünger is typically moved by things like a soldier's calm in the face of death, or his refusal to surrender unless surrounded. Here, though, the officer's appeal to his family, not his own honor as a soldier, inspires Jünger to let him go. It's difficult to say why, but Jünger's attribution of "blind chance" seems unlikely. Rather, it seems that even at his most hostile, Jünger has never entirely lost sight of those characteristics allow him to retain his humanity and empathy, even with his enemies. Even the "manly" Jünger, then, finds that duty in battle goes beyond a readiness to kill—mercy is part of it, too. It's also an example of how war's impact on the soldier's psyche manifests in unpredictable ways.

> Outside it lay my British soldier, little more than a boy, who had been hit in the temple. He lay there, looking quite relaxed. I forced myself to look closely at him. It wasn't a case of 'you or me' any more. I often thought back on him; and more with the passing of the years. The state, which relieves us of our responsibility, cannot take away our remorse; and we must exercise it. Sorrow, regret, pursued me deep into my dreams.

Related Characters: Ernst Jünger (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 241

Explanation and Analysis

After a successful offensive against the British, Jünger is on a high, enjoying plundered English delicacies and celebrating with his men. Even now, however, he takes the time to recognize the heart-rending humanity of one of the men—little more than a boy—whom he has just killed. This moment is interesting because of the insight it gives into Jünger's psychology, both as a man and more specifically as a soldier. Without regret, he sees killing as part of his duty—something the German state has required of him. Yet, at the same time, responsibility is distinct from human remorse—something Jünger sees not as a weakness, but as a duty unto itself in his assertion that "we must exercise it." He practices this duty long after his days as a soldier. This suggests that Jünger's view of war is even more complex than his memoir suggests—that the events of war can't be neatly confined to the battlefield, but that its repercussions spill out into the rest of life, requiring the veteran to deal with them for the rest of his days.

Suddenly there was a deafening crash on the edge of the trench. I got a blow on the skull, and fell forward unconscious. When I came round, I was dangling head down over the breech of a heavy machine-gun, staring down at a pool of blood that was growing alarmingly fast on the floor of the trench. The blood was running down so unstoppably that I lost all hope. As my escort assured me he could see no brains, I took courage, picked myself up, and trotted on. That was what I got for being so foolish as to go into battle without a steel helmet. In spite of my twofold haemorrhage, I was terribly excited, and told everyone I passed in the trench that they should hurry to the line, and join the battle.

Related Characters: Ernst Jünger (speaker)

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 252

Explanation and Analysis

Later in the final offensive on the Somme, Jünger suffers a double injury in the chest and head. Here he describes the second injury in grisly detail. As he's being accompanied back to the medic station, he's struck for a second time and briefly assumes he's received his fatal wound. His escort's reassurances prompt him to pluck up his courage, however, and even cheerfully encourage others to pick up his slack. With Jünger's overall self-characterization in view, this is actually quite a humorous quote—he's so battle-hardened by this time that, as long as his brains are safely in place, he's almost keen to re-enter the fray himself. Of course, Jünger could easily be dramatizing the events of his diary for greater effect. In any case, the episode sums up the curious euphoria that can overtake even a gravely wounded soldier who believes in his cause—an aspect of the uncategorizable drama of warfare, as Jünger has repeatedly explored it throughout his memoir. His reference to the lack of a steel helmet is also a bit of foreshadowing, as he later takes special care to don a helmet on the brink of his final assault.

British Gains Quotes

At such moments, there crept over me a mood I hadn't known before. A profound reorientation, a reaction to so much time spent so intensely, on the edge. The seasons followed one another, it was winter and then it was summer again, but it was still war. I felt I had got tired, and used to the aspect of war, but it was from this familiarity that I observed what was in front of me in a new and subdued light. Things were less dazzlingly distinct. And I felt that the purpose with which I had gone out to fight had been used up, and no longer held. The war posed new, deeper puzzles. It was a strange time altogether.

Related Characters: Ernst Jünger (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 262

Explanation and Analysis

This poignant passage sums up Jünger's feelings upon recovering from his latest round of injuries and preparing to rejoin events at the front. In contrast to the euphoria and excitement earlier in the Ludendorff offensive, now Jünger finds himself puzzlingly detached from Germany's fortunes in war. While recovering in the hospital, Jünger came to realize that Germany was, in fact, losing to the Western allies. His surprise at this shows how isolated soldiers could become within the all-consuming drama of the front lines. And though Jünger seldom editorializes regarding the larger war, this news depresses his spirits. Regardless of how he feels about Germany's cause (and he never makes that clear), the impending loss robs him of clarity and steals the abiding sense of purpose that has propelled him through four grueling years of work, privation, and suffering. This loss of the "dazzlingly distinct" clarity of purpose, and its psychological impact, is a sobering reminder that, in all eras, surviving a war—and making sense of life in the aftermath—can pose immense challenges to veterans.

To be in the narrow turret of such a tank, going forward, with its tangle of rods and wires and poles, must have been extremely unpleasant as these colossuses, in efforts to outmaneuver the artillery, were forced to zigzag over the country like huge helpless beetles. I felt keen sympathy for the men in those fiery furnaces. Also, the countryside was dotted about with the skeletal wreckage of downed aeroplanes, an indication that machines were playing an ever greater part on the battlefield.

Related Characters: Ernst Jünger (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 261

Explanation and Analysis

In the closing months of the war, Jünger has the opportunity to examine new, modern tanks and reflect on their emerging prominence in modern warfare. Tanks and airplanes were cutting-edge technology in 1918 and only became a major factor in fighting in World War II. However, the prototypes of the later machinery appeared just in time to add to the overall chaos at the close of World War I. Jünger's remarks on these technologies are sparing yet prophetic. An avid amateur naturalist, Jünger unsurprisingly compares tanks to elephants or beetles, referring to their lumbering size and limited maneuverability. His grim descriptions of both tanks and airplanes—"fiery furnaces" and "skeletal wreckage"—reflect the perspective of a man who not only favors nature over technology, but who came of age while depending on the flexibility of human creativity and leadership to achieve victory in war. His assessment of these new technologies suggests that, in his view, war's mechanization will stifle some of those very resources that shaped Jünger's war experience and made Jünger the leader he is—causing even greater suffering in the process.

We Fight Our Way Through Quotes

During the endless hours flat on your back, you try to distract yourself to pass the time; once, I reckoned up my wounds. Leaving out trifles such as ricochets and grazes, I was hit at least fourteen times, these being five bullets, two shell splinters, one shrapnel ball, four hand-grenade splinters and two bullet splinters, which, with entry and exit wounds, left me an even twenty scars. In the course of this war, where so much of the firing was done blindly into empty space, I still managed to get myself targeted no fewer than eleven times. I felt every justification, therefore, in donning the gold wound-stripes, which arrived for me one day.

Related Characters: Ernst Jünger (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 288

Explanation and Analysis

During his last assault in August 1918, Jünger sustains yet more injuries and is evacuated to Germany. With cavalier detachment, Jünger describes adding up the various wounds and resulting scars he received over four years of fighting (though, given his meticulous diary-keeping, it's hard to believe that Jünger hadn't been keeping a tally all along). Not only did Jünger receive the gold wound-stripes (a type of military medal) for his injuries, he also received the loftier *pour le Mérite*, bestowed by Kaiser Wilhelm, a short time later. The latter is the highest military honor a German soldier could receive, and it was rare for a lower-ranking officer like Jünger to receive it. Upon his death in 1998, he was the last living recipient of the *pour le Mérite*. Despite the loftiness of these awards, it's telling that Jünger seems more interested in detailing the number of wounds he received than the substantial number of medals he collected. Overall, Jünger's recollection of the war is less concerned with valorizing himself than with upholding duty to one's cause and one's comrades—so it's also not surprising that he ends the book, rather abruptly, on this matter-of-fact note.

SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

IN THE CHALK TRENCHES OF CHAMPAGNE

In December 1914, Ernst Jünger and his fellow soldiers get out of a train in Bazancourt, a town in Champagne, France. They are filled with amazement as they listen to the sounds of the warfront. Coming from various civilian backgrounds, the young men have bonded during their training. Having grown up relatively sheltered, they are "enraptured by war" and ready for danger. They expect the war to be "manly" and to give them the "extraordinary" experience they crave.

World War I broke out in late July of 1914, and Jünger—an adventure-seeking youth who'd earlier run away to join the French foreign legion—enlisted immediately after Germany entered the war. In contrast to their later attitudes on the front lines, the new recruits are idealistic, looking at war as a game that will give them the chance for personal glory.

The group marches to the village of Orainville, the base for the 73rd Rifles. The dilapidated village is mostly made up of bearded, idle veterans. After a night in a barn, Jünger is assigned to the 9th Company.

The 73rd Rifles was an infantry regiment of the Hanoverian 19th Division. Jünger remains with this group for the duration of the war. The young men's eager idealism contrasts with the battle-hardened veterans.

During breakfast, the soldiers hear explosions in the distance, and everyone rushes outside. Jünger doesn't understand why other men are ducking while running. Then he sees a contorted figure wailing for help as he is carried into the Red Cross building. It turns out that a shell burst has caused 13 fatalities. The event makes a strong impression on Jünger. He even has auditory hallucinations, causing him to mistake the sound of a passing cart for the sound of another incoming shell.

Jünger's inexperience is evident in his puzzlement about everyday life at the front. He doesn't understand the ever-present danger, and he's shocked by the grim realities of death—even a chance shell burst can cause terrible suffering. The close proximity of death quickly shatters Jünger's idealism.

Jünger soon learns that his habit of jumpiness will stay with him throughout the war. Even the sound of a dropped book or a random shout can be heart-stopping. Any unusual occurrence causes **Death** to "leap [...] with hand upraised."

Now that Jünger has been initiated into the horrors of the front, Death's hovering, unpredictable presence will haunt him, showing that war changes one's psyche as well as one's external circumstances.

That evening, the company marches through isolated woods to their battle station, a forester's house, where they're divided into platoons. Then they load their guns and march to the front. Jünger recalls the dark, single-file journey as being marked by a "strange mood of melancholy exaltation." At last they drop into a communication trench, where Jünger accompanies an older soldier to a sentry post, watching the front until dawn.

In modern military hierarchy, platoons are usually made up of around a couple dozen soldiers; a few platoons, in turn, make up a company (with a few companies making up a battalion and several of those, in turn, a regiment of perhaps a couple thousand soldiers). Though Jünger has been shorn of his youthful optimism, as a part of one of these platoons, he still feels a certain thrill in finally reaching the front lines.

This is only the beginning of a demanding routine in which the men of the platoon seldom get to sleep for more than two hours per night. Once the January rains set in, the long hours of sentry duty become a torment. During the day, the men catch what rest they can, in between duties like trench repairs and running for food or coffee. Most of the young men "ha[ve] only a nodding acquaintance with real work," so the demands of platoon life hit them especially hard. In addition, the veterans give the newcomers a hard time.

Like Jünger, many of the new recruits come from relatively privileged backgrounds that have ill prepared them for the rigors of life in the trenches. Exposure to the elements, sleeplessness, and constant physical demands add to the psychological and social pressures confronting them.

Within a short time of joining the regiment, the men become disillusioned. There's none of the danger they'd hoped for—just dirty work, boredom, and little sleep. They look forward to an attack, but the front is at a standstill, as men on both sides lie low in increasingly elaborate defensive trenches.

The monotony and strain of life in the trenches, again, defies romanticized images of warfare. Later, the men might wish for such boredom, but in its early stages, the war was largely fought from such entrenched positions, with little ground gained or ceded on either side.

In 1915, trench warfare is still a novelty. Much energy is poured into keeping watch, digging, and repairing trenches, but much of this proves later to be unnecessary. Jünger argues that the size of the trenches isn't what's important, it's "the courage and condition of the men behind them." In fact, the depth of these early trenches might have caused the men to become defensive and overcautious in their mindset.

Because Jünger fights in the war nearly from its beginning to its end, his narrative provides insight into the developments in modern warfare. At this stage, the prevailing wisdom is that sheltering in defensive trenches is the key to victory. With hindsight, however, Jünger suggests that this attitude impeded success in the long run.

Jünger tells of an incident that almost brought his career to an end in January 1915. One day, while on outdoor sentry duty, he wrapped a blanket around his head—against regulations—and set his rifle down in a bush. When he reached for his rifle upon hearing a noise, he discovered that it was missing. The duty officer had taken it away. As punishment, the officer sent Jünger on watch closer to the French lines, armed only with a pickaxe. But he survived, and on February 4, the regiment marched back to Bazancourt, relieved of their position in the trenches.

Jünger's incident, while not without its humorous aspect, shows that protocol was taken seriously—a momentary lapse could have deadly consequences, which is why the officer sends Jünger on his memorable, poorly-defended patrol.

FROM BAZANCOURT TO HATTONCHÂTEL

After a short time of being quartered in Bazancourt, Jünger's regiment sends him to the remote village of Recouvrence for a training course. Jünger finds life there to be an odd mix of military drill and student life. During the day, they undergo rigorous training, and in the evenings, both they and their instructors apply themselves with equal energy to drinking and occasional youthful hijinks.

While Jünger's narrative doesn't flinch from war's terrible realities, it's also filled with camaraderie and frank enjoyment of the good things of life. For Jünger, such things are almost as much a part of war as fighting—it provides contrast to the suffering and imbues it with meaning.

While in Recouvrence, Jünger forms some close friendships with men like Clement (who was to die at Monchy), Tebbe (at Cambrai), and the Steinforth brothers (at the Somme), who all form a household together. The villagers of Recouvrence were surprised by the men's fluent French. One day, at the barber's, a Frenchman told the barber to just cut Clement's throat. He was then horrified when Clement replied in French, "I'd just as soon hang on to it." Jünger describes Clement's attitude as "the kind of sang-froid that a warrior ought to have."

This amusing anecdote reveals a couple of things about Jünger's outlook. "Sangfroid" refers to coolness under pressure, an attitude Jünger repeatedly equates with "manliness," or the ideal warrior's attitude. A warrior should be unflappable, then, whether on the front lines or while dealing with the hostility of locals. Despite Jünger's general regard for the foreigners he encounters, the Germans are occupiers, which inevitably complicates relations with locals in occupied areas.

In mid-February, the members of the 73rd Regiment are grieved to learn that their fellows have taken heavy losses in battle at Perthes, earning their regiment the nickname "The Lions of Perthes." At the end of March, the graduates of the officer training course return to Bazancourt. Then the regiment travels to Brussels and is combined with two other regiments to form the 111th Infantry Division, which is what they remain until the war's end.

Jünger regrets being unable to participate in the regiment's honored actions, even as he continues climbing the ranks of leadership. This shows that his heart is with the other men, in the pressures of combat, and not with recognition for its own sake.

After this, around the time of Jünger's 20th birthday, the battalion is housed in a small Flemish town, Hérinnes. Jünger admires the half-Flemish, half-Walloon population. He befriends the owner of a café, a Socialist freethinker, who insists on treating him to lunch on Easter Sunday. Many of his fellow soldiers strike up similar friendships, visiting local farms on their afternoons off, conversing "in a blend of Flemish and Lower Saxon."

Belgium comprises Flanders, a region in which Dutch (or Flemish, a Dutch variation) is primarily spoken, and Wallonia, where French dialects are spoken. Flemish is similar enough to German dialects to make conversation possible. Jünger again shows his sensitivity and genuine interest in the people of Germany's occupied lands.

In April 1915, the battalion is moved to the battlefield of Mars-la-Tour, in Lorraine. It's right on the German border, and the soldiers sometimes cheer themselves by walking "home" in the evenings. Later that spring, they are moved to the Moselle hill country, ultimately to the village of Hattonchâtel, where they make camp beside the Grande Tranchée. Rumor has it that battle will begin in the morning.

The Grande Tranchée, or Tranchee de Calonne, was a road, about 15 miles long, along which many early tranches had been dug. The Battalion, therefore, is drawing deeper into the heart of the war, with more intense action to come.

LES EPARGES

The next day, following an artillery barrage (what Jünger comes to know as "drumfire"), the company is finally ordered forward. Further up the line, people are hit—Jünger sees bits of bloody cloth and flesh where the casualties were carried away. Shells and tree branches begin to crash down; a dead horse blocks the path. Amid all this blood and gore, "there [is] a wild, unsuspected hilarity."

Jünger gets his first taste of battle, and he portrays the vivid sensory details of modern warfare that assault him long before he reaches the front lines. The suffering caused by war doesn't only impact human beings, but the natural world as well. Exposure to such extremes also causes emotional reactions which are hard to explain or categorize.

The column continues marching loosely over no-man's-land, past dead and dying figures, and Jünger reflects that the experience is less frightening than he'd expected. They are held down by artillery fire for a while, then advance across French territory toward the village of Les Eparges. On the way, they pass dozens of frozen, unburied French corpses.

No-man's-land refers to the disputed, unoccupied land in between the German and French positions. Here, that territory is littered with the remains of fallen soldiers whom there's been no opportunity to bury. Yet, even as he sees the bodies of comrades, Jünger feels emotionally detached from the violent reality of battle.

The next day, Jünger examines the unfamiliar contents of the captured French trench and waits with his comrades while German and French bullets and shells fly overhead. Sitting with Kohl, a veteran of Perthes, Jünger is soon assured that this is his first "proper" battle. Later, as the group is moving toward a different position, they are pursued through a stand of beech trees by terrifying explosions. Suddenly, Jünger is wounded in the thigh by a piece of shrapnel. Taking shelter in the trench he'd just left, he discovers many other wounded men, some of them far worse off than himself. Horrified by their suffering, he flees back into the undergrowth outside, even as shells continue to fall.

Jünger and his comrades have succeeded in capturing some French territory, and he finds satisfaction in finally being directly a part of the action. When Jünger is wounded for the first time, he experiences the immediacy of suffering. Yet it's others' more dire suffering that frightens him more than his own, showing the complex psychological pressures of the battlefield.

Eventually, stretcher-bearers find Jünger and carry him back to the dressing-station. The next day, a wagon bears him through heavy fire to the main medical station, and he's ultimately loaded onto a hospital train bound for Heidelberg. Seeing his hometown in the springtime, Jünger "ha[s] good and serious thoughts, and for the first time sense[s] that this war [i]s more than just a great adventure."

For the wounded, even the process of rescue was typically harrowing, since medics risked their lives to transport and treat victims under fire. Jünger's experience of being wounded helps him recognize the gravity of warfare more fully, in contrast to his romantic view and youthful attitude months earlier.

At Les Eparges, Jünger has survived his first battle, and it was very different from what he had expected. During the entire engagement, he never set eyes on an opponent. Only much later will he experience the clash of opponents on the open battlefield.

Jünger's experience illuminates the complexity of modern warfare. When opponents huddle in trenches, there is very little face-to-face engagement, which lends a more detached and passive mindset toward combat. This will only become truer as warfare relies increasingly on tanks and planes instead of men with rifles and bombs.

DOUCHY AND MONCHY

While recuperating at home, Jünger's father suggests that he become a gentleman-cadet, so, once recovered, he reports for another training course, graduating as an ensign. The emphasis of his training is on moving across terrain in small groups. He rejoins his regiment in Douchy, France, in September 1915. Just as they arrive in Douchy, a shell explodes in front of his small troop of reservists, and Jünger has the opportunity to put his skills to work on the spot, leading the others into the village by means of a long detour.

Jünger continues to distinguish himself, moving up to the rank of ensign (a step above a private soldier, but still below the office of lieutenant). While he does display ambition, he appears to take greater pleasure in aiding his men than in the collection of ranks and honors for their own sake. Again, for Jünger, the measure of a soldier is action, not just attitude or external recognition.

Douchy becomes a beloved place of rest and recuperation for the men of the 73rd. Douchy had previously been a quiet rural village, but now, "like a great parasitical growth," it has "sprouted an army town." Its former civilian identity is scarcely detectable, as the remaining French population has been relegated to a corner of the village. The village's young people must report each morning for a work detail, and the soldiers rarely encounter other locals.

Often attentive to natural parallels, Jünger observes that war acts as a "parasite" on normal civilian existence, effectively sucking the life out of communities and even drawing upon those communities' resources in pursuit of its goals. He recognizes the unhealthy impact that outsiders and occupiers can have on local populations.

Less than an hour's march away is the captured village of Monchy-au-Bois, where the regiment's reserve companies are staying. The surrounding countryside is silent and mostly devoid of life. Jünger observes the mix of the debris of war and the remains of civilian life—battered toys, books, and household items among broken weapons, trenches, and even human bodies. In such surroundings, even a warrior is reduced to morose thoughts.

Jünger's attentiveness to detail is on display here. Not only is modern war parasitical on ordinary life, it's also destructive, as evidenced by the jumble of everyday objects alongside the discarded refuse of war. The impact of what he's doing, in other words, is never too distant from Jünger's thoughts, even as he continues to fight.

The front line forms a semicircle around Monchy. In order to reach it, one travels through a "sap," or communication trench, that zigzags in a perpendicular direction to the front. It takes about 15 minutes to reach the support trench, and then one reaches the firing trench. More than a mere ditch, the firing trench is 10 or 20 feet deep and contains sentry platforms from which a marksman can fire toward the front. In front of the trench is a barbed wire entanglement meant to halt an attacker. It's often entwined with weeds and wildflowers, among which partridges and larks often thrive.

Jünger provides some details acquainting readers with life in the trenches. The trenches are like small towns unto themselves, providing a temporary home for the soldiers as well as a base for fighting. The persistence of flowers and birds even among the barbed wire is a poignant image of the survival of nature alongside suffering and horror.

The trench often contains dugouts, in which soldiers can rest. They are actual living quarters with ceilings and walls, and though they're technically padded against artillery fire, they can become death-traps. Jünger describes the trench as a whole as "a secret hive of industry and watchfulness." At the same time, living underground lends itself to a kind of boredom.

Trench life is complex; these underground burrows are marked by a kind of coziness, and yet they are also inherently dangerous places to be, both because of the proximity to the enemy and because they seem to lull their inhabitants into a kind of daze, separating them from normal human existence.

Along with the rest of the 6th Company, Jünger joins C Sector, the regiment's most forward sector on the line. Jünger describes a typical day in the trenches. It begins at dusk. During tedious sentry duty, rat-hunting is a favored pastime. Men chat quietly about their lives, hopes, and desires to stave off the cold and boredom. Occasionally, one fires a round in the direction of an unidentified sound coming from the opposite trench. At some places on the line, the two trenches are close enough for a sentry to become familiar with his enemy counterpart's cough or singing voice.

Jünger continues to orient the reader to life in the trenches. In many ways, it's a lonely, isolating, dull existence in which men must hang onto their humanity as best they can, with varying levels of success. To an extent, the soldier becomes acquainted with enemy counterparts much as he gets to know his own comrades, albeit in a limited way (just their voices, not their hopes and dreams). The trenches, and the pressing realities of war, prevent both sides from seeing each other's humanity fully.

After two hours are up, a sentry is relieved of duty and may have a chance to read the newspaper or nap. Jünger covers two more wearisome sentry duties before dawn, then drinks coffee and gives his platoon that day's tasks, which are often repairs needed around the trenches. For such tasks, the men rely on one another's skills and trades. The day is punctuated by lunch, a nap, and additional sentry duty. In the event that a sentry is shot, the man is matter-of-factly bandaged and carried off, the puddle of his blood quickly covered with earth. At teatime, Jünger, as ensign, often joins senior officers for a formal tea. Some days, his "pen-pushing" duties almost make him long for an artillery barrage.

Life in the trenches is an odd combination of domestic routine, dullness, hard labor, and the bloodshed of battle. The bloodshed itself is treated as matter-of-fact routine—something that wouldn't disrupt the officers' regular teatime. This jarring juxtaposition shows the way that trench life habituates a soldier to realities that once would have seemed unimaginable.

DAILY LIFE IN THE TRENCHES

Overall, Jünger describes life in the trenches as "strenuous monotony," with occasional reprieves in Douchy. At the same time, there is a certain coziness about life in one's dugout, and the experienced soldier no longer notices the sounds of rifle fire or flares. C Sector has even come to feel like home. Jünger and his men have shivered there through snowy winter and sung there through long summer nights. When the colonel wants to transfer them to another location, the entire company begs him to let them remain.

Jünger continues to describe the strange combination of effects one experiences during life in the trenches. It's both comfortable and violent, familiar and threatening. This illustrates the complexity of being a modern soldier, which calls for both brutality and brotherhood.

Jünger includes a selection of his diary entries from life at Monchy. The entries include stories like a string of woundings and deaths in a single day, the sudden discovery of a long-abandoned French corpse, and the swamping of the trench after a night of downpours. Sometimes the men go hunting for game in the surrounding woods. On one occasion, an especially beloved member of the company, a father of four, is shot in the head. His weeping comrades spend a long time trying to shoot a "Britisher" in revenge.

Jünger's selection of events from his diary provides insight into the occasions he found worthy of note, demonstrating his focus on exceptionally disturbing incidents of death, violence, and discomfort. Meanwhile, the reactions of the men after their comrade is shot show that bereaved soldiers are hardly immune from vengeful motivations.

While the battalion is enjoying a period of rest in the town of Quéant, Jünger's commission as a lieutenant comes through, and he is posted to the Battalion's 2nd Company after having been with the 6th. During their reprieve, Jünger sees the sway held by local commandants, such as a Captain of Horse who calls himself the King of Quéant, who spends his time drunkenly touring the countryside in a dogcart and getting into feuds with other so-called "monarchs."

Jünger is quickly promoted again. At the same time, he witnesses firsthand the antics of men who enjoy their seniority too much—a phenomenon on which he offers little comment. His own code of "manliness" offers little room for such irresponsibility.

In December, Jünger rejoins C Sector at the head of his new company. He finds that the trench has been reduced to a muddy pit. He and the men spend weeks draining and rebuilding. One day, he emerges to find German and British soldiers talking and exchanging schnapps and cigarettes between the trenches. Suddenly a German soldier is shot dead, and everyone retreats to their respective trenches. Jünger negotiates with a British officer in English and French, remarking that they parted ways with "an almost sportsmanlike admiration" for one another, although they mutually declare war against each other "for clarity's sake."

Jünger recounts a unique occasion when both sides enjoyed some friendly camaraderie. Jünger also shows that he doesn't harbor ill will toward the enemy soldiers—rather, he respects them as soldiers who, like him, are doing a job. Even when such rare peaceful moments occur, the reality of war still looms.

Jünger remarks that, throughout the war, he always tried to view his enemy without hostility. Instead, he sought to evaluate his enemies on the basis of the courage they displayed. That doesn't mean he didn't seek to kill his enemies, and he expected them to do the same. But he never thought ill of his opponents, and he always tried to take good care of any prisoners who fell into his hands.

Jünger elaborates on his view of the enemy. He sees war as fundamentally a job a soldier must do. This view of war also frames his perception of his opponents, who have equivalent goals. This is why he tries to treat them with respect and dignity whenever possible.

The company spends Christmas Eve singing hymns in the mud, and the British respond with machine-gun fire. When the British erect a Christmas tree atop their trench, the Germans promptly shoot it down, with the British hurling grenades in response. Jünger notes, "It was all in all a less than merry Christmas."

In jarring contrast to Jünger's civil treatment of the British officer and even his prisoners, the two sides here do not extend one another much holiday warmth. Jünger's remark is characteristic of his terse, sometimes humorous observations. Humanity isn't lacking on the front lines, but it's not consistently present, either.

In the midst of other, typical war wounds and fatalities, Jünger observes that "overfamiliarity" was a frequent cause of casualties, too. Sometimes men would collect and tinker with "dud" shells, leading to deadly accidents.

Jünger has elsewhere observed that warfare takes strange tolls on the human psyche. Sometimes, it leads people to become too comfortable with their surroundings, with devastating effects.

Jünger notes that the British flanking battery causes considerable chaos that February—firing rounds about once per hour and robbing the battalion of especially valued comrades, a total of 10 casualties within the space of a few days. There is little to do to counteract such a barrage, except to reinforce the trench as soundly as possible. In March, the return of spring and consequent drying of the mud help a good deal. Jünger often enjoys harmonious meals and card-playing sessions with the other three officers, the "congeniality" of which compensate somewhat for the hard work and suffering they all must endure. During this time of largely stationery warfare, they settle into an almost "peacetime" routine.

By this point in the war, Jünger has learned to take fear, suffering, and loss largely in stride and to enjoy camaraderie and peace where he can find it. In contrast to the raw recruit of 1914, now, in 1916, he's come to understand the rhythms of a soldier's life.

THE BEGINNING OF THE BATTLE OF THE SOMME

In mid-April 1916, Jünger attends an officer-training course in which he receives instruction in such subjects as tactical excursions on horseback. One evening, he enjoys a pleasant dinner in the home of a spirited 17-year-old girl whom he nicknames "Jeanne d'Arc." Not long after, in June, he's sent back to his unit with the warning that their opponents are preparing a large-scale offensive on the Western Front—what would become known as the Battle of the Somme.

This latest lull in the war is one of the last Jünger will enjoy. In that light, his dinner with "Joan of Arc" has a kind of ironic youthful innocence about it: the war, relatively quiet until now, is about to enter a much harsher and fiercer phase.


Jünger explains that the Battle of the Somme "marked the end of the first and mildest part of the war." After the Somme, the war entered an altogether different phase—one marked by a shift from pitched battles to "a war of *matériel* of the most gigantic proportions." That war, in its turn, would shift, by 1917, to mechanized warfare.

Until now, the war has been characterized by "pitched battles"—battles that are planned and fought on predetermined ground. Now it's shifting to an emphasis on the use of matériel*—weapons, equipment, etc.—on a scale that hasn't been seen before in modern warfare.*

In Jünger's absence, the British had become livelier, so on the night of June 20th, Jünger leads a highly tense group to eavesdrop on the enemy trenches, a mission which returns unscathed. The next night, they decide to try to take a British soldier captive, but this time the British note their presence, and they're forced to scurry back amid heavy fire. The next couple of days are filled with an exchange of mortar fire between the two sides. When the company is relieved, Jünger watches the battle from the safety of Monchy and observes, for the first time, artillery fire that resembles heavy thunder and lightning.

As predicted, the war begins to heat up, with Jünger leading riskier missions, heavier fire being exchanged between the two sides, and artillery fire become an ever-greater spectacle. Comparing the artillery to thunder and lightning suggests that, like these nature forces, warfare has become immense, overwhelming, and unpredictable.

The following day, Jünger is back at C Sector when a gas attack hits. Jünger soon finds himself enveloped in chlorine gas, but quickly removes his gas mask because he's too breathless for the mask to supply enough oxygen, and the goggles have misted over. He makes it into Monchy, which is under an artillery barrage, and joins two men from his unit, who've started a bonfire to escape the effects of the chlorine. Soon, though, shells, bombs, and shrapnel start raining on the village, and Jünger finds himself huddled in a hole in the ground—an experience he likens to being "securely tied to a post, being menaced by a man swinging a heavy hammer." That night, there is another gas attack, forcing the men to start acrid fires in their quarters. The next day, plants have withered, many small animals are dead, and the bits of shells and ammunition littering the ground have turned green. In the next few days, several men die from the terrible effects of chlorine gas, teaching Jünger never to go without his mask again.

The Germans initiated the use of gas attacks during the World War I, with the Allied powers quickly following suit, as seen here. The use of such weapons as chlorine gas caused, at best, irritation and chaos and, at worst, disablement and death. The aftermath—dead animals and damaged weapons, to say nothing of the human toll—shows just how devastating these weapons were. Following World War I, they were officially condemned after their long-term effects became evident.

The next morning, the British launch a phosgene gas attack and then attempt to invade C Sector. The British get one wounded German captive, and the Germans seize one handsome young British man, whom they treat to a glass of wine. Studying him, Jünger thinks, "What a shame to have to shoot at such people!" Overall, while the British attack kills more than 40 Germans, they only get a single prisoner and lose many men themselves. It's a win overall for the Germans, who celebrate the following evening in Douchy.

The raising of stakes continues, with another gas attack and an attempted invasion of German territory. Again, Jünger's instinctive kindness to the enemy comes through in his curiosity and admiration toward the British prisoner. He sees the war as a "shame," but still sees it as a job he has no choice but to see through.

In late July, Jünger leads some of his men on a patrol toward British lines, and they narrowly escape with their lives, once again having failed to secure a British captive. That night, Jünger is unable to sleep, feeling a "supreme awakeness" in the aftermath of the intense experience. Summing up such events, Jünger remarks that they were worthwhile, even if unsuccessful in their objectives, because "there's nothing worse for a soldier than boredom."

Battle is invigorating for Jünger, and he sees this as a worthwhile outcome, even if there's no higher objective than relieving the tedium of the trenches. This is another example of the way that Jünger typically looks at war as a world unto itself and does not often consider the broader sociopolitical or cultural significance of the conflict.

In August, Jünger gets his first home furlough, but he's almost immediately summoned back to the front. He is greeted by the news that the men in his platoon have been asking for him. This cheers him, as he realizes that the young men not only respect his rank, but his character. As he drinks coffee with fellow officers that night, he senses that they are on the cusp of a battle unlike anything the world has seen before, and that they will be called upon to fight to the last man.

Jünger places a high value on personal character and not just on external rank, showing that he has a high bar for the soldier and, implicitly, for the conduct of war as well. The events before his furlough have been only a hint of the coming stage of the war.

GUILLEMONT

In late August, as the men are driven to the village of Guillemont (what will become known as the heart of the Battle of the Somme), the men are in high spirits. En route, one of the truck drivers injures his thumb, and Jünger is sickened by the sight, having "always been sensitive to such things." He remarks on the strangeness of this memory, given that he soon witnessed such horrible battlefield injuries; he suggests that one's responses to events are often determined by their context.

The men's high spirits contrast with the coming bloodbath of the Somme. The incident en route to the battlefield shows one of the ways that war, according to Jünger, alters one's perceptions. His squeamishness is still present, yet the battlefield mutes that sensitivity to suffering.

When they stop for the night, the artillery fire is louder than anything he's heard before. A runner guides Jünger's platoon to the town of Combles. The runner is the first German soldier Jünger has ever seen wearing a **steel** helmet, and right away, this signals the beginning of a harsher war. As the man describes his experiences, he sounds almost apathetic and impassive; yet Jünger says that it's just such men that are needed for fighting.

The runner in the steel helmet embodies the changing nature of warfare, as steel symbolizes the deadlier war that results from heavier weaponry. Jünger's approval of the man's apathy shows that he doesn't equate a fighting spirit with bloodthirstiness. Steadfast willingness to persevere in battle is more important than an appetite for violence.

On their way to Combles, the platoon passes through a notorious bottleneck that's filled with corpses and a "sweetish" smell of **death** that's both repulsive and strangely invigorating. Looking back on this experience, Jünger describes the occasion as having an "exalted, almost demoniacal lightness [...] attended by fits of laughter."

Jünger's eerie journey through the bottleneck is another example of his argument that exposure to suffering has a heavy psychological impact. He doesn't explain the "demoniacal" hilarity, but it's a response to the extremity of this unprecedently morbid experience.

The town of Combles has been decimated by heavy artillery fire. Jünger chooses as his quarters a house that had belonged to a brewer. The floors are covered with discarded clothes, books, furniture, and photographs. The men huddle in the basement, silent, heads aching, even thinking impossible under the ceaseless, thunderous artillery barrage. Later, the men are led, at a run, through heavy shrapnel fire to reach their position on the front line. It's an exhausting, terrifying run, as wounded men are left helpless by the sides of the road, and they find themselves stepping on corpses at one point.

The disarray in the brewer's house is another example of the disruption caused in civilians' lives by war. The terror of the war has been elevated as senses are assaulted by noise, darkness, chaos, and even contact with fallen bodies. Even the journey to the front lines is life-or-death, to saying nothing of the battle that awaits the soldiers once they reach their positions.

They finally reach the defile in open country that will be their position on the line. In the morning, they see dead bodies all around, and more are found as they begin to dig foxholes. They are soon mercilessly shelled. The British firepower capacity is far superior to the Germans' weak resources. Jünger has a fright when a nearly spent shell fragment hits his belt buckle. That night, a British ration party blunders into the German lines and is shot down; the Germans reason that they could never have taken them prisoner in these surroundings. When the unit is finally relieved, they still face a fearful gauntlet of shells as they hurry back to Combles. They camp in the forest, fortifying themselves against the rain with red wine.

The horrible nature of the war is illustrated by the undignified circumstances in which so many have fallen, never to be buried. Under such conditions, ethical lines become blurred, like the British who might, under quieter conditions, have been spared. There is no reprieve from the relentless storm of weaponry.

Back in Combles a few days later, Jünger's unit occupies the basement of a vintner's house, which is filled with antique art and books. After a relaxing afternoon of perusing a book, Jünger goes outside and is promptly struck by shrapnel in the left calf. His comrades carry him through fire to the medic across the street, where the surgeon reports that the bones are undamaged. He is delivered by ambulance to the hospital at St-Quentin just as the British are successfully taking Guillemont. After about a week in the hospital, he is back on his feet.

Even in the midst of such terrible conditions, Jünger doesn't lose touch with the things he enjoys—something he sees as vital to the humanity of the soldier. His latest injury shows just how deadly a war zone can be, even away from the front lines.

Jünger received reports from his orderly, Otto Schmidt, and others who remained behind in the defile outside Guillemont. By the morning after Jünger's evacuation, Schmidt, along with Sergeant Heistermann, Jünger's subordinate, appeared to be the only two men who survived the overnight bombardment from the British. They discover that a few others have withdrawn to a narrow shelter, but as they make their way to join them, Heistermann disappears and is never seen again. Not long after, the British overrun the shelter, and Schmidt is injured by hand-grenades. Combles falls not long after.

Jünger continues to show interest in the fates of his men even after he escapes from the front lines himself. In this case, the Germans don't withstand the British for very long, a foreshadow of things to come. The intensity of fire is such that people literally disappear off the face of the earth.

THE WOODS OF ST-PIERRE-VAAST

About a month later, Jünger rejoins his regiment at the Somme, and he is quartered with a family in Brancourt, including a loudly cursing wife and a beautiful young daughter. Jünger is assigned as a scouting officer, and he regrets having to leave behind the "family" of his company on the eve of battle. The scout troop travels to the village of Liéramont. From here, the scouts must reconnoiter the situation on the front each night, test communications, and report back regarding the need for any reinforcements. Jünger is assigned to the area just to the left of the woods of St-Pierre-Vaast.

Jünger enjoys his encounters with local people, taking care to include them in his narrative of the war and showing his fundamental regard for them. Even though his scouting duties take him off the front lines, to his regret—since camaraderie is central to his experience of the war—he's not insulated from the dangers of battle.

The scouting duty has its dangers. There's heavy artillery fire in the area at night, and once, Jünger gets lost and nearly drowns in a swamp. Once he escapes, Jünger soon notices an "oniony smell" and hears the cry of "Gas!" It's phosgene. Soon he's stumbling through the woods, his gas mask misted over, wandering past other lost troops.

Jünger's various duties offer a variety of perspectives on the war. Even scouting has many hazards, and the use of weaponry like gas adds to the otherworldly disorientation of the battlefield.

On his second scouting attempt, Jünger finds himself on the edge of an empty, shell-cratered field, and before he can decide his next steps, he is shot through both legs by a sniper's bullet. He crawls back through the woods and then hobbles to the medic station. Along the way, a happenstance chat with a former commander delays Jünger just long enough to prevent him from being hit by a nearby shell explosion. He observes, "It is hard to see these things as completely random."

Jünger's description of his latest injury is classic Jünger—an example of his much-vaunted manliness. He walks all the way to the medic station after having been shot, even taking the time to talk with a friend, and offers brief commentary on the coincidence of the delay.

In the following days, he's brought to the military hospital in Valenciennes. During this hospitalization, Jünger suffers "an attack of the glooms." He is especially saddened that he was unable to join his regiment in attacking the woods of St-Pierre-Vaast, an event which won the regiment many medals. He rejoins his troop after about two weeks, but before he reaches the division, he survives his train being bombed.

This is perhaps the first time in Jünger's memoir that he admits to having any strongly negative emotions about warfare—and, in this case, it has mostly to do with the fact that he was kept from fighting while injured. This shows Jünger's commitment to his men and to his personal sense of duty.

Jünger can't yet march, so he works as an observation officer on a hillside, watching the front line through a periscope. This post gives him the opportunity to appreciate the breakdown squad, a group who enters shell-holes to repair communications wires under the most dangerous conditions.

Jünger's admiration for the breakdown squad shows that, despite his own remarkable strength and courage, he appreciates different varieties of courage than those displayed on the front lines of battle.

In December, Jünger takes command of the 2nd Company. The regiment enjoys four weeks of rest and holiday parties in Fresnoy. Only five men remain from the 2nd Company as it was constituted one year ago at Monchy. During this time, he's summoned to divisional headquarters to receive an Iron Cross First Class, since, the General tells him, "you have a habit of getting yourself wounded."

The war has exacted a tremendous toll on Jünger's unit over the past year. He enjoys life as much as he can while off the front lines. The Iron Cross First Class was awarded for German military service from the late 19th century through the end of World War II, bestowed without regard for the recipient's rank.

RETREAT FROM THE SOMME

In February 1917, following some additional officer training, Jünger rejoins his regiment and takes over command of the 8th Company. Jünger occupies a cozy dugout about 50 yards from the front line, often enjoying the company of officers Hambrock, a freckled astronomer, and Eisen, a plump, near-sighted man with the bad habit of carrying live hand-grenades in his pockets. Both men die within a few months.

Jünger seldom writes in great detail about his comrades; they don't appear as developed characters in his narrative, except for battle episodes, or, as here, brief descriptions of domestic life in the trenches. This is consistent with the episodic nature of Jünger's diary-keeping, on which the memoir is based.

In light of rumors of an even more extensive *matériel* offensive by the British, the Germans engage in a tactical withdrawal. At one point, about 50 British attack the trench, but the Germans are prepared, and only one British soldier actually makes it inside. One British sergeant is brutally injured but remains calmly smoking his pipe until he dies. Jünger is favorably impressed by the man's "bravery and manliness."

A tactical withdrawal is a gradual withdrawal undertaken while still maintaining contact with the enemy—for the purposes of withdrawing to more favorable ground, for example, or consolidating one's forces. Jünger remarks again on the hardiness of enemy soldiers, showing that he respects soldiers who fulfill his ideals of "manliness."

In March, Colonel von Oppen assigns Jünger to hold the front with two platoons while the regiment withdraws across the Somme. As the platoons move to the front, Jünger observes that other companies are furiously dismantling villages, smashing or stealing everything within reach. He finds the sight "half funny, half repellent." He sees such destruction as something that dishonors the soldier as well as hurting civilians.

These observations of Jünger's are an example of a place where his commentary is influenced by hindsight. At the time, he sees destruction and looting as partially funny, but with time and reflection, he comes to appreciate how such activities are dehumanizing for the perpetrators, as well as for those whose property is stolen or destroyed.

On March 13, the rest of the regiment withdraws, and Jünger's company remains in the position, readying booby-traps and time-bombs for their enemies to find. A few days later, after repelling an English attack, Jünger's men blow up their foxholes and withdraw towards the Somme, the last to cross the river before the bridges are blown up. They settle into the village of Lehaucourt, where they're awarded a two-week furlough, and Jünger treats his friends to mulled wine.

The regiment completes their tactical withdrawal by making sure that their defenses and any remaining supplies are useless to their enemies, showing how military conquest can also be strategic and calculated rather than overtly violent.

IN THE VILLAGE OF FRESNOY

After the furlough, Jünger is ordered to set up an observation post near the village of Fresnoy. He and his men commandeer a little house for their viewing-station and residence. One day, he sets up an intelligence-clearing station, complete with telephone and telegraph wires, carrier pigeons, and bicyclists at his disposal. That night, he's so tired that he sleeps through the shelling of the observation post.

In an age before wireless communication, setting up wartime communications was a laborious business. Selectively bred messenger pigeons were used during World War I to pass messages across dangerous territory and sometimes even for reconnaissance tasks like aerial photography.

In late April, Fresnoy begins to be bombarded with artillery fire, and on the 27th, they receive intelligence of a coming attack. Jünger and his men face the terrible task of pulling corpses from the wreckage of a neighboring house. They have just enough time to regather in their own basement, fortifying themselves with cherry brandy, before the bombardment intensifies. When Jünger finally receives a valuable piece of intelligence to pass on—that the enemy is occupying nearby Arleux—his finds that his means of communication have all been destroyed by the artillery barrage. He realizes the error of having over-centralized the intelligence post. He and his men flee the house and village just in time to avoid destruction.

The destruction of the intelligence post in Fresnoy teaches Jünger too late that setting up all the intelligence methods in one place was a mistake; his work is handily destroyed by the artillery bombardment that strikes the village. The artillery fire during the battle of the Somme is merciless and brings unprecedented death and destruction along the front lines and nearby villages.

A few days later, Jünger and his men are moved to the village of Flers and subsequently to an enjoyable rest period in Serain. Jünger recalls cheerful reunions with comrades—"among the fondest memories an old warrior may have." At reunions like these, survivors savor reminiscences over drinks. Jünger observes that veterans embody both "an objective relish for danger" and "a chevalieresque urge to prevail." Men who have survived the war for this long are bolder than ever.

For Jünger, the war has a kind of refining function for those who've made it this long. This isn't so much a glorification of war as an observation that those who manage to survive—by luck as much as skill—become ever more emboldened over the years and more bonded in their brotherhood.

AGAINST INDIAN OPPOSITION

By May 1917, Jünger's unit is back on the Siegfried Line, which they'd left just a month earlier. By this time, Jünger barely notices the shrapnel or shells, which just seem to him like another sign of spring—a new offensive is on the way. The coming weeks are fairly peaceful; Jünger even enjoys a "summer holiday" reading Ariosto in a rural village.

The "Siegfried Line" shouldn't be confused with the German defensive line of World War II. The Siegfriedstellung, or Siegfried Position, was constructed along the Western Front in 1916-1917 with the hope of delaying an Allied offensive. Jünger's version of manliness isn't solely based in military conquest or physical strength—rather, he always makes room for enjoying literary pleasures when he can, and here appreciates the Renaissance-era Italian epic poet Ariosto.

In late May, the company occupies a large estate behind the front line, the base for several machine-gun nests. Jünger explains that such support-points were the war's first attempts "at a more supple, variable form of defense." Jünger enjoys evening strolls around the farm, admiring nature's tenacious liveliness.

As Jünger continues to observe the development of modern warfare, he sees the German army attempting to move beyond the stasis induced by trench warfare. He continues to seek out signs of life amidst the barrenness of war, showing that he made a concerted effort to stay in touch with his humanity in the midst of battle.

On May 30, Jünger rejoins his old 2nd Company on the front line. The British gunners aren't very skilled, and at first, it's a relatively quiet time. In June, Jünger is ordered to take 20 men to an outpost on the front. Soon he joins another company on an ambush "for the hell of it." Before long, they are surprised to encounter a group of British in the open. After a firefight and hearing some indeterminate accents in the distance, a line of attackers surprisingly emerges into the open. The Germans overpower the other group without getting a good look at them. Later, Jünger returns to the scene of the battle and discovers that the survivors are from India, the First Hariana Lancers. The encounter has the feeling of "ancient history" to Jünger. The company is later recognized for fighting off the much larger group of Lancers with only 20 men. In the midst of stalemated trench warfare, Jünger had been dreaming of just such a battle.

Jünger's keenness for action shows that, despite his fondness for books and nature, at the same time he takes real pleasure in fighting. This also comes through in the fact that he'd been "dreaming" of an open battle like the firefight that occurs here, encountering a unit from the British Indian army. The existence of this group is a reminder of Britain's imperial reach at the time of World War I and the superior manpower they were able to draw upon thereby—a factor that will come up later in the war, too. At the time, it gives Jünger an uncanny feeling of the clash of civilizations; the war truly spans the globe like no war has before.

Later that month, their outpost is attacked again, and Jünger's unit loses a machine-gun, which they ultimately fail to regain. After Jünger's men are relieved by troops from another division, the outpost is ultimately lost.

This sequence of events shows how quickly fortunes reversed along the Western Front, and how many lives were spent in pursuit of short-lived, dubious victories.

LANGEMARCK

When the Germans occupy Cambrai, they overturn the sleepy lifestyle of the old cobblestone town. With all the soldiers quartered there, it comes to resemble more of a college town. Colonel von Oppen assigns Jünger to train a group of storm troops. He designs the training regimen himself. He spends his leisure hours living with a kindly jeweler couple. By the end of July, however, they move to Flanders, where they've heard there is an even heavier artillery war raging than they'd seen at the Somme.

The presence of the soldiers alters the nature of civilian towns, showing once again the complex nature of solider-civilian relations. When Jünger is called upon to train other soldiers, it shows how much his experience is respected, as well as his commitment to the best outcomes for his men.

Soon the regiment arrives in the Flemish countryside, hearing "that rough tongue that we almost thought we understood." As they head toward the front line, Jünger hears some young recruits speaking admiringly of his apparent lack of fear. The truth is that Jünger is just experienced enough to determine the course of an overhead shell by its sound, so he doesn't take cover every time.

Jünger's remark that "we almost thought we understood" Flemish—a Dutch dialect which has come commonalities with German—further highlights the complicated nature of relations with those whose lands are being occupied. Culturally, they have much in common, but there's a marked power imbalance. Also, Jünger shows that an apparently courageous absence of fear is often simply a better of hardened experience.

After taking his position with the reserve commander in the battered town of Mauseberg, Jünger soon witnesses a "demented fury" of shelling, and an infantry battle begins soon after. He observes that his company has arrived at just the right time. He leads them to their position in the midst of a desolate shell crater. They hunker down in the midst of the horrible shelling and wait for their turn on the front line in an impending counterattack.

Jünger often uses language that highlights the insane, inhuman characteristics of war. Even though the shelling is terrifying, his commitment to duty makes him feel that their arrival comes at exactly the right moment.

Jünger leads his company toward the Dobschutz woods in an effort to support the counterattack. Amidst the prevailing confusion, Jünger leaps right into the heart of the shelling, somehow reaching the objective with five men in tow. There they find Lieutenant Sandvoss, commander of the 3rd Company, and Schultz. They explain that the position is cut off from other troops, with the British pressing right against them. Sandvoss informs Jünger that Jünger's brother, Fritz, had been reported missing after last night's attack. Jünger feels "appalling, irreplaceable loss" at this news.

Jünger, not shrinking from the disorienting storm of shelling, charges into the fray to lead his men, showing again that duty is the defining characteristic of a good soldier. Hearing about the potential loss of his brother, however, is the most devasting moment of the war for Jünger—a crack appearing in his steadfast façade for the first time.

Then Jünger learns from another soldier that his brother is wounded in a nearby shelter. Jünger runs through sniper fire to get there. He finds Fritz with a punctured lung and shattered shoulder, barely able to speak. Jünger comforts his brother as best he can and then assigns some men to carry Fritz through the storm of shells to the medical station. He feels it's the best he can do, both as a brother and as his mother's son.

This stirring scene of Jünger's care for Fritz, and for his mother by extension, shows that brotherhood is an even higher duty for Jünger than his place beside his men.

Later, the regiment is relieved and sent to occupy a battered-looking fortress, the Rattenburg, beside a river. Jünger checks on his brother during a break in the firing and happily learns that Fritz has been sent back to Germany in stable condition. Soon he and a small band are defending the Rattenburg against an enemy advance; he forces some stragglers at gunpoint to join the defense. But by the time the British infantry is closing in, it's hard to get the formerly reluctant men to stop shooting. Jünger is the last man to withdraw. On the way out of town, they encounter Kius, from the 2nd Company, whose men had urged him to come and rescue Jünger. The groups occupy a roadway and picks off as many British as they can with rifle fire, enduring a storm of shell explosions.

Jünger takes a series of events in stride, showing his resilience under fire—he continues to care for his brother, he rallies reluctant men against the British (to the point that their own attitudes change over the course of the firefight), and he continues menacing the British even when there's no longer hope of defending the Rattenburg. Jünger's commitment to duty requires flexibility and responsiveness to the rapidly changing conditions of modern war.

The next morning, Jünger's foxhole is swamped by relentless rain, which he finds more demoralizing than any artillery bombardment. It turns out to help the Germans, though, because it bogs down the English advance. Survivors assemble in the village of Koekhuit to assess their immense losses. The remnants of the battalion are quartered on a farm, where Jünger is put in charge of the 7th Company, with whom he stays for the rest of the war. He finds satisfaction in the knowledge that, despite the staggering resources of the enemy, just a handful of Germans held off their attack, having an impact beyond their numbers.

For Jünger, morale is key to the fulfillment of duty, and something like rain—which puts a halt to battle—can therefore be more depressing than enemy action. In addition, even when his side is struggling, he's able to take pride in what they've accomplished relative to their numbers.

Jünger gets a letter from Fritz, who's recovering in Germany. He inserts part of Fritz's account of being under artillery and gas bombardment from the British as a newer recruit. After Fritz was hit in the lung and shoulder, he found himself stranded in a crater as the battle and thunderstorm raged above. He was eventually rescued by officers, who got him to the medical station where Ernst found him and secured his evacuation.

Though Fritz's account doesn't add many new details to the overall narrative, Jünger shows a rare moment of sentiment by showcasing his brother's survival experience.

REGNIÉVILLE

The company gets a brief respite in the town of Doncourt. Here Jünger gets a lesson about theft: he and a friend, Tebbe, steal a glass coach from a Flemish mansion and go joyriding. Unfortunately, the coach has no brakes, and Jünger just manages to escape the resulting crash unhurt. A few days later, they march to the village of Regniéville to occupy a position on the line once more. Here they are fighting the French, not the British. Jünger is pleased to discover that the trenches are constructed from marl, a sturdier type of mud, and he also collects many interesting fossils. However, the lice and rats are a menace, and the food is unsavory.

Jünger's and Tebbe's episode of the stolen coach is easily the most humorous event in Storm of Steel. *Besides confirming his more mature instinct that stealing from civilians never pays, it displays Jünger's frank enjoyment of life—something that virtually any soldier off the front lines would feel compelled to indulge while he had the chance. Even as he goes back to the line, Jünger enjoys observing (and critiquing) elements of his natural surroundings and living situation.*

During trench duty, Jünger befriends an older officer named Kloppmann, whose courage he admires. They make a couple of unsuccessful raids on the French trenches. Later, regimental headquarters asks Jünger to lead another such raid and take some French prisoners. He leads one group and is in overall command of a total of three. Given that it's late in 1917, he is surprised how many men eagerly volunteer for the mission. He takes a total of 14, including Kloppman. They spend 10 days practicing for the raid.

Jünger's courage is evident once again in his nonchalance about undertaking such dangerous raids. The men's eagerness to participate also confirms Jünger's view that the war produces increasingly refined, emboldened soldiers.

At 5:05 the next morning, feeling aware of the seriousness of the undertaking, Jünger leads his men into enemy territory. They encounter no resistance when they enter the trench. As they move through the seemingly empty trench, Jünger notices a mess-tin with an upright spoon standing in it and files this image in his memory. Dodging a few tossed grenades, they find themselves increasingly disoriented, until they eventually stumble upon the mess-tin again and figure out their location. By the time they extricate themselves from the trench, they've escaped with only four German lives, a French machine gun, and no French prisoners.

Leading men on an offensive raid into enemy trenches is a highly risky endeavor, with little room to maneuver, no margin of error, and a high probability of danger—even death. Jünger's keen powers of observation save his life in this instance, but the raid isn't successful, showing the high stakes of trench warfare.

After the adventure in the trench, Colonel von Oppen comforts Jünger despite the lack of success. Later, he's given a ride to the divisional command, where the staff officer crankily blames Jünger for the mission's failure. Jünger realizes that at divisional command, the outlook on war is far more detached. To the staff officer, the mission was just a plan on paper, not "an intensely experienced reality."

Jünger's trip to divisional command makes him realize that war on the front lines is different from war as it's experienced further up the hierarchy, where danger isn't a daily reality. As usual for Jünger, duty is most honorable when it's a matter of behavior under fire, not external recognition.

The next day, Jünger and the other surviving members of the patrol are awarded Iron Crosses and two weeks' furlough. Later, he learns that some of the other men were taken prisoner and survived. Kloppmann, though, was among those who had been killed. Jünger looks back on the whole event as one of the most "eerie" moments of his war.

Jünger and his men are duly rewarded for undertaking their dangerous invasion of the French trench, adding to Jünger's already extensive decorations. However, the venture was costly for him and the other men.

FLANDERS AGAIN

After the furlough, Jünger and his men are moved to a Flemish town called Roeselare. He stays in a house with an elderly housekeeper, her daughter, and a little orphan girl the two have taken in. He has been designated as an intelligence officer for the time being and spends time getting acquainted with the nearby 10th Bavarian Regiment in order to learn his duties. As he wanders around Roeselare, he admires the cozy pubs and the friendly Flemish language, hoping that this "splendid country," so often a battleground, will one day enjoy peace and freedom again.

Roeselare is a city in West Flanders, Belgium. As in World War I, Belgium has often found itself contested between more belligerent neighbors, especially France and Germany. Consistent with his usual attitudes toward civilians, Jünger enjoys Flemish hospitality and takes note of the distinctive culture, recognizing that his presence imperils that culture to a degree.

That night, Roeselare is bombed, and Jünger joins the women in the basement. He even turns on his flashlight to calm the distraught little girl. He admires the women's tenacity in the face of fear—despite the dire circumstances, "they cl[i]ng fast to the ground which at any moment might bury them."

The Roeselare women display their own warrior-like tenacity, which appeals to Jünger, and he shows compassion to them.

In late October, Jünger sets out with his reconnaissance group through heavy shelling and sets up near the regimental headquarters. The town and the front line are occasionally attacked, and Jünger narrowly avoids death by choosing at the last minute not to take shelter in a farmhouse during artillery fire; the farmhouse collapses moments later. His intelligence duties require frequent, perilous reconnaissance journeys across wastelands pocked by shell-craters. The British advances over the coming days cause massive casualties.

The relentless artillery barrages continue to threaten arbitrary death at any moment, and the Western allies are gaining significant ground by this point in the war.

In early November, the unit enjoys a brief respite in Tourcoing, France. It's the last time in the war that most of the men get to sleep on real beds and enjoy some pleasant luxuries. Jünger, for instance, is able to relax in a comfortable armchair in front of a fire. The men feel lucky to have survived this long and intend to enjoy life while they can.

Despite their already dire surroundings, things actually can and will get worse—but the men get a much-needed taste of civilian life first.

THE DOUBLE BATTLE OF CAMBRAI

Jünger and his men are sent back to the front, near the village of Vis-en-Artois. At the end of November, they are summoned to join a counter-offensive and are driven to the castle grounds of Baralle. On the day of the attack, they follow a canal to headquarters, where they learn that the offensive isn't going so well. At seven sharp the next morning, with butterflies in his stomach, Jünger leads his men to the Siegfried line, and they begin to attack the British trench. Before long, young British soldiers emerge with their hands in the air. Jünger feels joyful as he watches a long line of about 200 men surrendering.

Although the Germans are faltering, the successful attack and surprising capture of such a large group of British is a huge triumph for Jünger.

When Jünger is led to the British company commander, who is wounded, the man explains that his company was surrounded. This assures Jünger that the commander "was a real man." They shake hands. Then Jünger, "like an old feudal commander," allows his men to plunder the British trenches, gathering weapons and provisions, for a few minutes. Jünger himself enjoys some British tobacco and cognac while writing up his reports of the action.

Jünger respects the fact that the British commander didn't give in until he had no other choice; to him, that's the height of soldierly fortitude. And despite his disapproval of heavy looting in other circumstances, he thinks his men entitled to a bit of plunder, showing that there's a gray area in the heat of victory.

As they are moving forward along the Siegfried Line, there's some British resistance, so Jünger asks for volunteers to make another attack across the open field. The only volunteer is a Polish man whom Jünger had considered to be a "cretin," but the comports himself admirably, reminding Jünger that "you can't say you really know a man if you haven't seen him under conditions of danger."

Jünger's view of "manliness" is displayed again, as a man proves himself under battlefield conditions, disproving Jünger's earlier assessment of him.

They face down further British resistance over the course of the next day. Eventually, they're inspired by a drunken subaltern who's desperate to get at the "Tommies." They race toward the British lines, hurling hand-grenades and dodging corpses all the way. They ultimately trap the group of British soldiers in a communications trench and finish them off. In the process, Jünger is grieved to learn that his longtime friend Tebbe has been killed. All in all, Jünger is pleased with the achievement of his 80 men and sustains only minor wounds, for which he refuses hospitalization, allowing them to heal over the Christmas leave. The battle of Cambrai is remembered as an attempt "to break out of the deadly stasis of trench-fighting by new methods."

In the thick of battle, Jünger is not too discriminating as to what he finds inspiring—drunken belligerence even serves in a pinch, and it works well here, as the Germans make another successful attack. In fact, it's an advance in the war as a whole, and a further illustration that the war is moving beyond pitched battles and entrenchment as its primary methods and toward more aggressive measures.

AT THE COJEUL RIVER

Jünger doesn't get many days of rest before his unit is called to relieve another company on the line. They're troubled by frequent gas attacks, shells, and cold. They soon hear rumors, coming all the way from Ludendorff, of another big offensive coming, so they begin to practice accordingly, sometimes using live hand-grenades and sustaining casualties as a result.

Erich Ludendorff was one of the leading generals of the German high command during WWI. The offensive described here was Ludendorff's attempt to make one final push for victory in 1918—hence Jünger's willingness to engage in such high-stakes training.

In late January, Colonel von Oppen leaves to take charge of a battalion in Palestine. Jünger considers von Oppen, a man of great confidence who instilled a family atmosphere among his regiment, to be "living proof that there is such a thing as a born leader." Sadly, von Oppen died of cholera not much later.

Jünger spares a few rare words of warm praise for an individual—in this case his esteemed Colonel, whose greatest attributes Jünger sees as his courage and leadership of his men.

Preparing for a huge push on the front line, they spend February laying roads and building up trenches. On the eve of battle, the men are optimistic about the success of the coming offensive. On March 17, they march to Brunemont.

The effort known as the Ludendorff Offensive—which lasted from March through July 1918—goes forward, with Jünger and his men taking their places along the front lines in the Somme.

THE GREAT BATTLE

On their way to the front lines of the big offensive in late March, the men lose their way in the boggy landscape. Suddenly, a shell explodes in their midst. Instinctively, Jünger wants to flee the horrifying scene, but he returns to tend to his suffering men. Some of his most beloved men, gravely injured, cling to Jünger and call his name, but he has to leave them in the care of the stretcher-bearer. "Moments like that," he observes, "are not easily shaken off."

The Ludendorff Offensive immediately shows itself to be a costly endeavor, with a large number of the company being wiped out in one stroke. This is one of the most devastating moments in the war for Jünger, though he sums it up in his characteristically restrained style.

Jünger and his few remaining men wander the trenches in confusion for several hours, finally taking shelter in some cubby-holes meant for munitions. After being reunited with others from his battalion the next morning, he decides that he will never again entrust his men to any guide he hasn't chosen himself.

The offensive has an discouraging beginning, thanks to incompetent guidance that costs the company dearly, but the men finally make their way to the line.

Depressed from the disastrous events, Jünger dreads being summoned to the front line again, but he goes. Shortly before the next morning's attack, it's announced that the Kaiser and Hindenburg are on the battle's scene of operations, and everyone applauds. Right on time, a thunderous barrage is unleashed, silencing the enemy artillery. Though the men's spirits begin to rise, the eventual shellfire is sobering, and Schmidt is killed.

In light of such a visceral, personal loss, the appearance of Kaiser Wilhelm (the German emperor) and General Hindenburg (commander of the German army) seems almost like a visit from another world, at best an irrelevance to what's actually happening on the front lines.

When the moment for the attack comes, the men are eager, and Jünger feels confident that they have the strength to strike a decisive blow against the enemy. The moment feels historic. As masses of men begin charging toward enemy lines, Jünger feels overcome by rage and the desire to kill. He comments that an outsider might have thought the sobbing men were all "ecstatically happy."

The attack exemplifies many of the dynamics of warfare—a certain bloodthirstiness, fueled by grief at the loss of friends, as well as a state akin to ecstasy at such a climactic moment.

Though no one opposes them as they leap into the British trench, they're soon met by machine-gun fire. As he penetrates deeper into the trench, Jünger finds himself alone. He soon encounters a lone British soldier. Jünger feels a cold relief at finally confronting an enemy face to face, but to his surprise, the man suddenly pulls out a photograph of himself with his family. Jünger lets him go and later dreams of the man, hoping he got to rejoin his loved ones.

In light of the emotions just expressed, this is one of the most surprising moments in Jünger's narrative. The preceding moments have created the expectation that Jünger will brutally kill the first enemy he finds, yet he shows mercy instead—another example of the uncategorizable impact of battle on the human psyche.

Jünger's memories of the attack fade in and out. He does recall killing a British machine gunner, and soon after, masses of British and German collide with one another, shooting at point-blank range—something he's never witnessed in the war before. Before long, the British are on the run, and the Germans keep shooting, knowing they've gained the upper hand. By this time, there's no need for formal leadership; all the Germans charge onward as one. As Jünger takes out another determined British machine-gun nest, he casually observes that the vigorous exercise seems to have gotten rid of his nagging cold.

In contrast to the virtual stalemate of trench warfare, this battle erupts into face-to-face firefights. Jünger and his men triumphantly rout the British, and Jünger is back to his wryly observant self, having regained his sense of purpose.

After a brief moment of refreshment with the other surviving officers, Jünger and the rest continue their advance, receiving many British surrenders and shooting those who resist. Jünger forces himself to look closely at one young British soldier he has shot. Over the years, sorrow and regret haunt his dreams of this boy.

There's a certain fierceness about this phase of the battle, yet Jünger's humanity isn't completely effaced even here, as he humanizes and even regrets those he kills. Empathy and ferocity sometimes appear side by side even on the battlefield, further complicating the soldiers' roles.

The men have little opportunity to rest. Early the next day, they're ordered to storm the nearby village of Vracourt. One of Jünger's former drill instructors is killed. Eventually, it's decided that the position is sufficiently secure, so Jünger hunkers in a crater to enjoy some English jam and pull on some Scottish woolen socks. Later in the day, however, there are signs of a strong British counterattack. After nightfall, Jünger and his men get in an intense firefight with some scrappy Scottish highlanders.

In a characteristic move, Jünger happily savors some small luxuries (plunder from the enemy) even in the midst of the battlefield. This is another example of the strange proximity between cultures created by war, as well as the frequent blend of suffering and small pleasures.

At one point, Jünger flings his rifle aside and plunges into the enemy line with his bare fists—forgetting that he's wearing an English coat he'd nabbed from a captured trench. After scattering the Scots, Jünger is chatting with Kius when they both notice he is bleeding from the chest—likely shot by a German who mistook him for English. He starts carefully making his way back for medical attention.

After the strains of recent days, as well as his steadily growing boldness over the course of the war, Jünger's foolhardy plunge into the line is not surprising; he is carried away by the complex emotions of battle. In this moment, it costs him.

Suddenly, as he's making his way across a trench, Jünger gets a blow on the skull and, when he comes to, he sees an alarming flow of blood beneath him. His companion assures Jünger that he sees no brains, so Jünger calmly continues on his way, figuring that's what he gets for neglecting to wear a **steel** helmet. "In spite of my twofold haemhorrage," he recalls, "I was terribly excited."

Jünger's calmness in the face of his double injury—as well as his keenness to keep fighting despite everything—is a perfect encapsulation of his character. Even though he is severely wounded, he is still more concerned with his duty as a soldier than with his own personal safety.

Jünger is transported to a field hospital, where he finds that his orderly, Vinke, has made sure that Jünger's baggage is waiting for him. He remarks that Vinke taught him about "the stolidity and decency of the common people." While healing in Germany, he learns that his faithful Schultz had fallen in the fighting. Before long, he also gathers that, despite the tremendous effort made in the offensive, Germany is actually losing the war.

Jünger finally gets some relief from the strains of battle. He again recognizes the variety of faithfulness displayed by soldiers—even Vinke's dutiful conscientiousness is worthy of mention. Despite the offensive and his immense personal effort, however, Jünger recognizes the bigger picture.

BRITISH GAINS

On June 4, 1918, Jünger rejoins his regiment at Vracourt, receiving a hero's welcome. As they rejoin the line, a haunting "carrion" smell reminds them of recent engagements. They take up an exposed position along the line, where they're not allowed to entrench, but must stay on the offensive. Jünger spends much of his time sunbathing and feeling invulnerable, despite the ongoing shellfire. He also feels an unprecedented sense of fatigue and a loss of purpose. The war is a "puzzle" to him now.

After all this, one might expect Jünger to linger in his recovery, but as always, he's eager to get back to his men. However, war no longer feels the same—after four years of fighting, and the looming reality of Germany's loss, his steady sense of purpose has been obscured. Europe is so scarred by war at this point that the very landscape carries strong sensory reminders of traumatic violence.

During a rest period, Jünger has the opportunity to examine some shot-up tanks—what he calls "elephants of the technical war." He also likens them to "huge helpless beetles" and feels sorry for the men who must traverse the countryside in them. The land is also dotted by downed planes, a further sign of the changing of the tide of warfare.

Jünger's observation of the tanks is an indicator of the direction that modern warfare is moving—that is, in an increasingly mechanized direction. Ever the naturalist, he compares the tanks to cumbersome animals, suggesting that he sees them as impractical and inflexible.

After weeks of very minimal gains and losses, Jünger is ordered to take some men on a mission to recapture a section of the trench that has been infiltrated by the British. Jünger is reluctant, and none of the men are eager to fight, but they obtain the objective. Nevertheless, the British are pressing ominously against their lines. Jünger narrowly avoids being shot by a sniper while reconnoitering one day, and on the cusp of another offensive, a number of men suffer terrible wounds from their own side's shelling.

Jünger's war-weariness is shown by the fact that, for the first time, the prospect of a daring mission doesn't excite him. The following lapses of luck and tragic injuries fill the waning months of the war with a sense of exhaustion, purposelessness, and impending doom.

While attempting to retake another part of the trench, Jünger and his men face some fearsome New Zealanders in an unexpected bottleneck. They survive this, only to face a terrifying artillery barrage, which reduces the line to 15 men. They're gratefully relieved a short time later. Jünger calls the enemy's attacks a "storm of **steel**" that is only strengthening, thanks to draftees (like the New Zealanders) from all over the world.

Like the British Indian unit Jünger faced earlier in the war, the appearance of the New Zealand soldiers reminds him of Britain's vast reach, its resources dwarfing Germany's by this point in the war. The titular phrase "storm of steel" gives a sense of an unstoppable foe which has mastered the art of modern warfare.

MY LAST ASSAULT

In late July 1918, Jünger is withdrawn to a rest period in Northern France and spends some of his time training a shock troop, understanding that such small, resilient troops are more reliable in an advance than the majority of exhausted soldiers. As he rides around the countryside, he comes upon propaganda leaflets dropped by the British, promising a comfortable life in prisoner-of-war camps.

Despite his weariness, Jünger remains faithful to his sense of duty; even at this late juncture, he still tries to refine Germany's battle-readiness. But as the somewhat mocking leaflets make clear, the end of the war is closing in.

On August 23, Jünger receives marching orders to the front once more. He's also warned about the danger posed by new tanks. Jünger addresses his men a final time, finding that there's little to say—everyone knows the Germans are losing, but that they must stand firm. He leads three platoons toward dugouts as airplanes strafe overhead. He then naps for a while until woken up with the news that they're about to go on the offensive. He hurriedly marches his men to their position in the village of Favreuil.

For Jünger, courage requires steadfastness even in the face of certain loss. But his eagerness for battle is gone, as shown by his improbable nap on the eve of the offensive.

The company moves through the rubble-strewn village toward its castle grounds. Jünger puts on a **steel** helmet he finds lying on the ground. He calls this advance "our last storm," remembering similar days over the past four years. He feels the attack is a hopeless mistake, and he views it more impartially than passionately.

When Jünger dons the random steel helmet, it symbolizes how much war has changed over the past four years. Such helmets, and the vicious artillery fire that makes them necessary, are now commonplace.

Just as Jünger is leaping over a trench, he feels a "piercing jolt" in his chest and falls to the ground with a cry. Compared to his many past injuries, he now feels "**Death**'s hand" with a "firmer and more determined" grip than before. Yet he feels entirely happy, suddenly understanding his life's purpose. He has a sensation of sinking, as if beneath "the surface of some turbulent water," to a place where "there was neither war nor enmity."

Jünger is gravely injured not too far into the battle. As he did when he first arrived on the front, here he personifies Death as an inescapable force that gets its prey sooner or later. Yet, at the same time, he also regains his lost sense of purpose. He doesn't explain what it is, but one senses that it transcends the events of the battlefield.

WE FIGHT OUR WAY THROUGH

Briefly unconscious, Jünger wakes up to the sound of stretcher-bearers being summoned. An older man kindly stops to check Jünger's wounds and fan him, as he's sweating terribly. As the battle continues to storm around him, Jünger hopes the darkness will fall again. Before long, he hears a desperate message being passed along: "They've broken through!" This gives Jünger a renewed sense of life. Still bleeding, he sits up and surveys the battle. He sees British soldiers sweeping through the village with fixed bayonets, and German prisoners being marched along.

The seemingly invincible Jünger rallies again, again displaying his unyielding sense of duty. But it's very clear by now that the Germans won't last long, and the image of British soldiers marching German prisoners shows just how dire their circumstances are.

Jünger feebly encourages nearby soldiers to keep fighting, even as a ring of British soldiers closes in, calling for surrender. He acknowledges that now, "there was only the choice between captivity and a bullet." He laboriously pulls himself out of the trench and staggers toward the village, dodging British fire. His blood loss makes him feel intoxicated. He finally joins a pocket of German resistance by an earthworks. A medic forces him to lie down, so he won't bleed to death, and rolls him into a tarpaulin. Unable to crawl away from the continuous storm of bullets, Jünger waits "almost apathetically" to be shot again.

If it's a choice between captivity and a bullet, it's not surprising that Jünger would choose the latter, as more befitting a true soldier—even rousing himself from what had seemed to be his death throes in order to meet his fate.

A corporal picks up Jünger, promising to try to get him through to the German lines, but the man is shot and killed before they've advanced very far. Jünger later visits this brave man's parents to pay tribute to him. Finally, another volunteer successfully carries Jünger to a sheltered stretch of ground and ultimately to a dressing station, where a morphine injection finally brings relief. After that, the only remaining obstacle is the wild ambulance ride to the hospital. Once there, he's soon comfortably under the nurses' care, reading his copy of *Tristram Shandy* as he'd been doing before the attack began.

Improbably dodging Death once more, Jünger finally makes it off the battlefield for good, and in characteristically dramatic fashion. He's survived the war.

Jünger has been shot in the lung, so the recovery is arduous, but he receives encouraging visits and letters. He also spends many of the bedridden hours thinking over the war; once, he totals his wounds. He determines that, aside from ricochets and grazes, he's been hit at least 14 times—with bullets, shell splinters, shrapnel, grenade splinters, and bullet splinters. This adds up to a total of 20 scars. When Jünger receives a pair of gold wound-stripes, he feels fully justified in wearing them.

Gold wound-stripes are a type of medal awarded to those, like Jünger, who've endured much of the real thing. Jünger takes an almost understated delight in summing up his sufferings. He doesn't comment further on the larger outcomes of the war. Rather, he takes comfort in the faithfulness to duty which his many wounds symbolize.

Two weeks later, Jünger is taken to Germany by train. In the hospital in Hanover, he joyfully reunites with Fritz. One day, while walking with his brother and other comrades, he feels the need to demonstrate his "war-worthiness" by leaping over a large armchair. It goes poorly—he's soon back in bed with a dangerously high fever. But while being nursed back to health, he receives a telegram from General von Busse, informing him that the Kaiser has bestowed on him the order *pour le Mérite*.

Jünger's setback—the result of trying to prove, albeit playfully, that he's fit for battle once more—ends his narrative on a somewhat humorous note. His lingering illness almost overshadows the fact that he's been awarded the highest military honor available. Upon his death in 1998, Ernst Jünger was the last living recipient of this military award.

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