In a memorable scene in the makeshift crowded hospital in a French cathedral, Paul visits his wounded, dying buddy Kemmerick who lies in pain in the dying room. He complains that there are robbers - his watch has been stolen, and he wonders about the pain in every toe on his right foot. Unaware that his leg has been amputated, he suddenly realizes that his leg is gone. With a startled cry, he moans: "They've cut my leg off. Why didn't they tell me?...I can't walk any more."

One of the visiting comrades admires Kemmerick's new boots and asks: "What good are they to you? I could use them...." After the group leaves, Paul lingers behind and is asked by the dying man: "Do you think I'll ever get well?" Kneeling at his bedside, Paul prays for his pal: "Oh God. This is Franz Kemmerick, only 19 years old. He doesn't want to die. Please don't let him die." As Kemmerick dies, a callous, death-weary doctor/surgeon cannot attend to him. The camera focuses on the boots as Paul leaves the hospital and brings them to his friend Muller after Kemmerick's death. As the new owner of the boots puts them on his feet, Paul is stunned by what he has witnessed:

I saw him die. I didn't know what it was like to die before! And then, then I came outside and it felt so good to be alive, that I started in to walk fast. I began to think of the strangest things like bein' out in the fields, things like that. You know, girls. Then it felt as if there were something electric running from the ground up through me. And I started. And I began to run hard and I passed soldiers, and I heard voices calling to me, and I ran and I ran, and I felt as if I couldn't breathe enough air into me. And now I'm hungry.

In a masterful montage, the boots are passed from one soldier's feet to another as each new owner dies wearing them.

During idle moments, the soldiers think about being home, or how useless their training was: "They never taught us anything really useful, like how to light a cigarette in the wind, or make a fire out of wet wood, or bayonet a man in the belly..." Their original class of German schoolboys has been decimated:

Out of 20, three are officers, nine dead, Muller and three others wounded, and one in the mad house. We'll all be dead someday so let's forget it.

In another moving, powerful scene during a bombardment, the Germans are attacking through a church cemetery. "Yellow rat" Himmelstoss joins the attack and is on scratched, yet reacts as if mortally wounded. Soon after, he is killed by the blast of enemy shells. Knocked in the head and dazed, Paul takes cover in the church's graveyard. Next to him, the insides of one of the coffins is blown out of the ground by an exploding shell and flung over him - a symbolic living grave. In another shell hole, Paul ducks down and crouches with his rifle and knife ready during the French counter-attack under heavy shell fire. When the French are retreating, one of the French soldiers (silent film comedian Raymond Griffith) jumps into the shell hole with him. Paul panics, holds the man with his left hand, and stabs him in the throat with the bayonet knife in his right hand.

In perhaps the most memorable, painfully bleak scene of the film, he becomes trapped in the shell hole with the mortally wounded Frenchman. He gags the soldier's mouth to prevent him from crying out and signalling enemy troops. Paul attempts to wash his hands of the blood of the man. He cannot leave the crater during the on because of overhead fire, and must remain with the groaning, dying man through the night as life slowly ebbs from the man. During the night, light from the explosion illuminates the grotesque, dying face of the enemy.

Filled with remorse and emotional-spiritual agony, he tries desperately to "atone" for the murder. He approaches the slowly-dying man and offers: "I want to help you. I want to help you." He moistens a cloth with water from the shell hole and brings it to the Frenchman's lips. In the morning, he can't stand hearing the dying man's groan any longer: "Stop that," he screams. "Stop it! Stop it! I can bear the rest of it. I can't listen to that! Why do you take so long to die? You're going to die anyway." Then, after realizing his commonality with the fallen soldier, he begins to wish that the man will live and return home safely: "Oh, no. Oh, no. You won't die. Oh, no. You won die. They're only little wounds. You'll get home. You'll be all right. You'll get home long before I will."

Paul brings more water for the man to sip, but it is too late. An unforgettable close-up catches the dead man's face in a half-smile with a staring, accusatory look thro
All Quiet on the Western Front (1930)

http://www.filmsite.org/allq2.html

his wide-opened eyes. Anguished, Paul speaks to the man:

You know I can't run away. That's why you accuse me. I tell you I didn't want to kill you. I tried to keep you alive. If you jumped in here again, I wouldn't do it.

Paul delivers an impassioned speech to the man, pleading for forgiveness from the corpse of the soldier he has killed. In other circumstances, the Frenchman could have been a friend or a comrade rather than the enemy:

You see, when you jumped in here, you were my enemy - and I was afraid of you. But you're just a man like me, and I killed you. Forgive me, comrade. Say that for me. Say you forgive me! Oh, no. You're dead! Only you're better off than I am. You're through. They can't do any more to you now. Oh, God, why did they do this to us? We only wanted to live, you and I. Why should they send us out to fight each other? If we threw these away these rifles and these uniforms, you could be my brother just like Kat and Albert. You'll have to forgive me, comrade. I'll do all I can. I'll write to your parents.

Paul searches in the man's pockets and finds a picture of the dead man's wife and child. To the dead man, named Gerald Duval, he promises that he will take care of family and then breaks down sobbing: "I'll write to --- I'll write to your wife. I'll write to her. I promise she'll not want for anything. And I'll help her and your parents, too. Only forgive me. Forgive me! Forgive me!"

When night-time finally comes again, Paul escapes back to his own lines.

Remorsefully, Paul tells Katczinsky that he stabbed and killed a man, his first in hand-to-hand combat. Katczinsky reassures him: "You couldn't do anything about it. You all have to kill. We can't help it. That's what we are here for...Now don't you lose any more sleep over this business." Paul makes a guilt-relieving excuse: "Maybe it was because I was out there with him so long, huh?...After all, war is war."

During a brief interlude in the horrible war, the soldiers have a chance to drink beer and sing German songs in a tavern. While taking a bath in a canal that day, four of them spot three French farm girls on the other bank. A German guard forbids them to cross the canal when they attempt to offer the girls a loaf of bread and a roll of sausage. Later that night, Paul, Albert, and Leer rendezvous with the peasant girls, arriving naked after a moonlight swim. They have shed their clothes to get across canal. After being given dresses to wear, they trade bread and sausages for the girls' company during the romantic idyll.

Marching on their way to a new offensive, Paul suffers a near-fatal wound in his side. He is introduced to the boys:

his sister Anna (Marian Clayton) rushes down the stairs to embrace him. During the protagonist's homecoming, it upsets him to find a peaceful and complacent world with which he now has little contact. After learning that his mother (Beryl Mercer in the sound version of the film, who replaced comedic actress ZaSu Pitts who was originally cast in the role) is bedridden, he visits with her by her bedside where she is overwhelmed by his presence: "Here I lie crying instead of being glad."

She doesn't believe her "baby" is really there:

Oh, Paul. You're a soldier now, aren't you? Somehow, I don't seem to know you...Are you really here Paul? You won't disappear, will you?

He gives her the impression that the front isn't as bad as she imagines. While he changes into civilian clothes in his boyhood room, he looks at his mounted butterfly collection on the wall.

In the beer cellar, Paul's father (Edwin Maxwell) toasts an introduction to honor his son:

But we know how to honor the soldier who goes on in spite of love and death.

His father's elderly friends are still belligerent, banal, and out of touch with the realities of war: "And how are things out there? Terrible, eh? Terrible. But we must carry on. After all, you at least get decent food out there. Naturally it's worse here. Naturally but the best for our soldiers all the time. That's our motto: 'The best for our soldiers.' But you must give the Frenchies a good licking," one of them tells Paul. Looking at a map of the Western Front on a table, Paul is told how Germany must strike ahead to win the war before the 'boys' can come home: "There's the line. It runs so. Shove ahead out there, and don't stick to that everlasting trench warfare." I understates the truth: "When you get in it, war isn't the way it looks back here."

The ignorant old gentleman discounts Paul's experience in the war: "Oh! You don't know anything about it. Of course, you're needed. But this relates to the whole, and you can't judge that. Of course, you do your duty and you risk your life. But for that, you receive the highest honor." Gesturing at the paper map, the elderly men argue over the whole.

Part Four:

After recovering, Paul is given leave to return to his small hometown and civilian life. When he enters the front door of his home, the bright sunlight streams through the stained glass windows. His sister Anna (Marian Clayton) rushes down the stairs to embrace him. During the protagonist's homecoming, it upsets him to find a peaceful and complacent world with which he now has little contact. After learning that his mother (Beryl Mercer in the sound version of the film, who replaced comedic actress ZaSu Pitts who was originally cast in the role) is bedridden, he visits with her by her bedside where she is overwhelmed by his presence: "Here I lie crying instead of being glad."

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Paul leaves the table - they don't even notice his disappearance.

False, out-of-touch, romantic ideas of war still persist in his former school. He hears, through the open window of his old schoolroom, the same teacher Professor Kantorek, still glorifying war to a new group of young students - potential soldiers, that they can "save the Fatherland." The teacher notices Paul in uniform at the door of the classroom. To prove all that the instructor has lectured on, the seasoned soldier is introduced to the boys:

Here is one of the first to go, a lad who sat before me on these very benches who gave up all to serve in the first year of the war. One of the iron youth who have made Germany invincible in the field. Look at him, sturdy and bronze and clear-eyed, the kind of soldier every one of you should envy.

The teacher urges Paul to address the starry-eyed, astonished lads in the classroom and deliver a patriotic speech:

Professor: You must speak to them. You must tell them what it means to serve your Fatherland.

Paul: No, no, I can't tell them anything.

Professor: You must Paul, just a word. Just tell them how much they're needed out there. Tell them why you went and what it meant to you.
Paul: I can't say anything.
Professor: Can't you remember some deed of heroism, some touch of nobility to tell about?

Contrary to his Professor's wishes, Paul delivers a non-glamorized, pacifist declaration and speaks about what it means to realistically serve the Fatherland in war. He describes life in the trenches and what war is really like:

Paul: I can't tell you anything you don't know. We live in the trenches out there. We fight. We try not to be killed; sometimes we are. That's all.
Professor: No, no Paul.
Paul: I've been there. I know what it's like.
Professor: But that's not what one dwells on, Paul.
Paul: I heard you in here reciting that same old stuff, making more iron men, more young heroes. You still think it's beautiful and sweet to die for your country, don't you? We used to think you knew. The first bombardment taught us better. It's dirty and painful to die for your country. When it comes to dying for your country, it's better not to die at all. There are millions out there dying for their countries, and what good is it?

Paul is branded a coward and hissed and booed by the class of boys, but Paul knows better:

Paul: You asked me to tell them how much they're needed out there. (To the boys) He tells you, 'Go out and die,' you know. But if you'll pardon me, it's easier to say 'go out and die' than it is to do it.
One of the boys: Coward.
Paul: And it's easier to say it than to watch it happen.
All the boys together (some rise to their feet): You're a coward.
Professor: No! No! Boys! Boys! (To Paul) I'm sorry about that, but I must say...
Paul: It's no use talking like this. You don't know what I mean. Only, it's been a long while since we enlisted out of this classroom. So long. I thought maybe the whole world had learned by this time. Only now, they're sending babies, and they won't last a week! I shouldn't have come on leave. Up at the front, you're alive or you're dead, and that's all. You can't fool anybody about that very long. Up there, we know we're lost and done for, whether we're dead or alive. Three years we've had of it -- four years. And every day a year, and every night a century. And our bodies are earth. And our thoughts are clay. And we sleep and eat with death. And we're done for, because you can't live that way and keep anything inside you. I shouldn't have come on leave. I'll go back tomorrow. I've got four days more, but I can't stand it here! I'll go back tomorrow. Sorry.

His words are wasted on the new recruits, who have already been indoctrinated for the war machine. Almost with relief, Paul decides to return to the front four days before his leave has expired.

In a sad farewell scene just before he goes, his ill mother caresses his head and wishes that he would stay longer. She warns him about loose women: "There's something I want to say to you, Paul. It's just be on your guard against the women out there. They're no good."
Paul reassures her: "Where we are, there aren't any women, Mother." His mother is fearful of his return: "Be very careful at the front, Paul...I'll pray for you every day and if you could get a job that's not quite so dangerous... With tears in her eyes, she kisses him goodbye, after telling him that she has put two new pairs of warm wool underwear in his pack.

A few old comrades are still alive in his second company unit, but it is mostly filled with replacement recruits - the camera pans across the faces of young, green, sixty-year-old lads like he was once - and not so many months ago. Paul finds that most of his company have been killed except for Tjaden who is gratified to see him: "It's gonna be a real war again." The company is short on food and supplies: "There used to be some food in the sawdust. Now it's all sawdust. No joke either." Tjaden is discouraged by the raw, inexperienced soldiers unlike the old-timers of the second company: "Replacements are all like that. Not even old enough to carry a pack. All they know how to do is die."

To foreshadow Katczinsky's death, Tjaden tells Paul: "If he were out, the war would be over. You remember what he always said: 'They're savin' him for the last.'" Katczinsky is found alive - out foraging to feed the young replacements on an open road about two miles away: "trying to collect something to make soup with." The company is pleased to see his friend and seasoned comrade on the day of his return. Paul describes his difficult adjustment period at home:

Paul: Oh, I'm no good for back there any more, Kat. None of us are. We've been in this too long. The young men thought I was a coward because I told them that we learned that death is stronger than duty to one's country. The old men said: 'Go on! Push on to Paris!' My father even wanted me to wear my uniform around him. It's not home back there anymore. All I could think of was: 'I'd like to get back and see Kat again.' You're all I've got left, Kat.
Kat: I'm not much to have left. I missed you Paul.
Paul: At least we know what it's all about out here. There are no lies here.
Kat: 'Push on to Paris'? You ought to see what they've got on the other side. They eat white bread over there. They've got dozens of airplanes to our one. And tanks that'll go over anything. And what have we got? Guns so worn they've dropped shells on our own men. No food, no ammunition, no officers. 'Push on to Paris'? So that's the way they talk back there.

After they talk for a while, they walk back to the unit. On the way, a plane's bomb wounds Kat's kneecap. Paul interprets the injury as good luck: "That means the war over," but Kat thinks the war will be over when he is really dead. Paul carries the wounded gruff veteran strung over his shoulders. Another aerial attack from an enen plane explodes a bomb behind them. Paul shouts into the sky: "You can't get both of us in one day!" As he brings Kat to safety, Paul doesn't immediately realize that older soldier has already died from a bomb splinter in the neck from the second plane attack. He continues talking to the corpse across his shoulders, reminiscing about the mentoring he received as a young recruit from Kat on "how to dodge shells" in his first bombardment.

In a heart-rending, effective scene, Paul lays Kat down and goes to get water from his pack. He begins to carefully reach out over the protection of his bunker with his hand to grasp it, momentarily forgetting the danger that is ever-present...
As he stretches his hand out yearning for its beauty, a distant French sniper prepares to take careful aim through a scope on a rifle. As he leans out closer to the butterfly and extends his hand, suddenly the sharp whining sound of a shot is heard. Paul's hand jerks back, twitches for a moment and then goes limp in death. [The hand actually belonged to director Lewis Milestone who shot the scene and included his own hand in the final print. The scene was suggested to Milestone by Czech cinematographer Karl Freund.]

All is silent and quiet. The harmonica tune stops.

In the film's grim epilogue, there is the haunting image of a dark, battle-scarred hillside covered with a sea of white crosses. Across the corpse-strewn fields, a superimposed ghostly view emerges of Paul and his comrade soldiers in a column marching obliquely away from the camera toward a void. They are ghostly soldiers who, one by one, look back with bitterness, sadness and accusation in their eyes.

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