Under Fire Study Guide

Under Fire by Henri Barbusse

BOOKRAGS

Contents

Plot Summary

Under Fire: The Story of a Squad by Henri Barbusse provides a gripping first-hand account of life and death in the trenches of the Western Front during World War I to be published. With most of the narrator's comrades killed, a group of survivors from various units debates matters of war and peace, nationalism and justice, and then return to battle.

Under Fire: The Story of a Squad by Henri Barbusse opens in the peaceful Alps as a group of intellectuals contemplate the coming horror of World War I. They hope that the soldiers who survive will force the world to change its ways. The unnamed narrator, who takes notes with an eye to writing a book, is assigned to a squad of diggers who fortify the front-line trenches on demand. They work by night and loaf by day. Much of the action takes place during rest periods between assignments.

When two men, Volpatte and Fouillade, are detached from the squad and lost, searchers are sent out. Volpatte is sent to the rear for repair of his wounds, while several of his comrades become enamored of a beautiful girl, Eudoxie, while enjoying a lovely rest period in Gauchin-l'Abbé. Lamuse grows depressed when Eudoxie rejects him. Eudore uses his leave to visit his wife for the first time in 15 months, but manages only a half-minute kiss. Volpatte returns from the rear livid about the "shirkers" who function there.

The narrator describes various vignettes, including Fouillade's recollection of his Mediterranean home a visit a local tavern. Poterloo takes the narrator on a "pilgrimage of peril" to Souchez, which has been leveled and tells him of recently sneaking into Lens to see his wife, only to find her flirting with German officers.

The story intensifies when the squad is sent to Hill 119, where the opposing armies are 100 yards apart. What begins as a beautiful fireworks display turns into a deadly "avalanche of fire and iron." The squad is ordered into battle, is caught in a wall of "barrage fire," and the few members release blood lust on the token German defenders. The narrator sees in a Refuge center the horrors of the walking wounded until a bombardment destroys it. While digging a New Trench in "No Man's Land" on a raw, rainy night, the squad again experiences barrage fire but the real damage is done by nature, as rain and a shallow water table turn the trenches and holes into deadly sucking mud. The few survivors talk philosophically about war and peace, justice, equality, and hope, before resigning themselves to return to the fighting.

Chapters 1-3

Chapters 1-3 Summary

A servant brings to a silent sanatorium word that war, as expected, is declared. The invalids, cultured, intelligent, and detached from worldly affairs, reflect on the horrors to come: 30 million soldiers dead, veritable mass suicides. Thrones will fall. Whether this can be the last of all wars is debated. Silence returns as each attends to his own pains. In the evening, they gather, will they could "Forbid the Storm," and hope for a transformed world.

Chapter 2 pictures a stormy dawn after a night of non-stop rifle and artillery fire, which has gone on for 15 months. The men of Cpl. Bertrand's reserve squad emerge from the ground to face another taskless day. They talk about the bombardment and the stench of the 129th as it trudges past. The squad is on call at night to build emergency earthworks at the front, during the day they invent ways to stay warm and dry and fight parasites. They are of all ages and occupations, have reverted to "the state primeval," merge into one another as they wait endlessly, rusting like their rifles, grumbling about cooks and food that they serve, and, after eating, tell ribald stories. Trivial fights occur regularly. Rain turns the afternoon clammy and dull and space seems to shrink on these enclosed human cattle. They talk about survival and the joys of looting food, drink, and especially firewood.

A visit by "trench tourists" offers journalists diversion. Editors have been predicting swift victory for 15 months. An orderly reads trivial orders and offers hope of six weeks rest in Morocco or Egypt. After briefly imagining this, the men settle in to writing letters, which often brings out the best in them. Territorials troop by to fortify the second line, and become the butt of jokes about age and infirmity. By contrast, the ferocious Moroccan Division is admired. They signal an imminent offensive. In all, the soldiers are simple men torn from the joys of life, hoping to survive and enjoy life again. They are mustered to the front with their shovels and picks.

Chapter 3 depicts the author meeting an old friend, Cp. Marchal in the Alleux Wood to which the 5th and 6th battalions have pulled back after suffering heavy casualties. Marchal describes the grizzly deaths of common friends by bombardment, while those who have come out of hell celebrate "the Feast of the Survivors."

Chapters 1-3 Analysis

Chapter 1, "The Vision," uses the peaceful grandeur of the snow-covered Alps to create a stark contrast with word that World War I has been declared threatens. Anonymous invalids housed in the Sanatorium decry the coming suicidal losses. They are an international, intellectual lot, seemingly clairvoyant. One foresees an upheaval equal to the bloody French Revolution. The German and the Austrian denounce their countries'

aggression. In a vivid, apocalyptic passage, the third-person narrator depicts the men watch the tranquil valley's devastation. Rivers of Death will flow in all countries. An optimist hopes that this will be the last war; a pessimist believes that "there is no cure for the world's disease." The common Vision ends as each refocuses on his own miseries, but at dusk they regather to hope for a better future, after the world's transformation. They have the air of gods on Olympus or, if written a century later, benign aliens observing Earth. The rest of the book graphically depicts the devastation and muddy survivors in the final chapter take up these existential themes.

By contrast with this anonymity and literary richness, Chapter 2, "In the Earth," introduces a host of characters, and the writing slugs through mud and filth with them. They are the "poilu," French infantrymen, drawn from throughout lower society, and after 15 months of living in the filthy trenches, blended together. The anonymous narrator builds up individual characters in the course of examining general traits: their eccentric costumes, headgear, footwear, and former lives. As he makes his observations, he pops in details of faces, expressions, voices, and temperaments, making use of diverse figures of speech. A few characters emerge as full-fledged personalities: Barque the sage who with magnificent Tirette plays the cut-up, Lamuse the heroic loafer, Pépin the dubious and proud, Tirloir dubbed "The Grumbler" by his comrades, who consider him "daft and crazy," and Volpatte who is ready to the "kick the bucket" at any point. Commanding them is the aloof Cpl. Bertrand.

The bulk of this very long chapter is devoted to showing the tedium of life in the second-line trenches by following the men's existence from dawn until dusk. It is broken by the brief visit of journalists on tour and by the passage of two units through their midst: the "Territorials," broken down old men who have come to reinforce the second-line operations, and the Moroccan Regiment, bloodthirsty fighters whose presence means an offensive is at hand. During the night before, another unit marches through and is disgusted by the stench of these men who live underground in their own filth.

The narrator begins to expose himself as a soldier who has once silenced a bad-tempered non-commissioned officer, who now has it in for him. He never fully reveals his identity but becomes an integral part of the action beginning in Chapter 3, "The Return." He hears from his old friend, Cpl. Marchal, about the grizzly deaths suffered by mutual friends. What artillery shells do to human flesh is graphically described, and by the end of the novel have become commonplace. Meanwhile, the survivors are happy to be out of hell. They will be sent back to the front in six weeks, but for the present celebrate "the Feast of the Survivors."

Chapters 4-6

Chapters 4-6 Summary

In Chapter 4 Farfadet and the narrator are sent out to find the missing men named in the title. Volpatte is wrapped in bloody bandages, happy that he will be sent to a comfortable hospital and allowed to see his family. As they walk out of the forest, the foursome sees beautiful Eudoxie, whom Lamuse is tracking. He breaks off to help carry his comrades' gear.

In Chapter 5 the regiment takes up residence in Gauchin-l'Abbé, after a grueling by day and night march. Lamuse negotiates sleeping space from angry Palmyra, which extends to kitchen privileges and access to her illegal wine cellar. Finding themselves "damned well off," under a roof and eating at a table, the squad talks about life in an occupied village. The narrator and Lamuse go for a stroll through the sprawling army camp. Lamuse is certain that Eudoxie is following him and he intends to marry her. When they meet Eudoxie, however, she fights him off Lamuse' advances and stalks away, leaving him dejected. Pépère becomes the envious talk of camp and town when he is transferred to the rear. Biquet receives a letter from his mother and laughs about her outdated concern about cold and mud: "We're all right now." There is no more to be said than that.

Chapter 6 depicts the men spending what should be their final day of leisure but hoping for extensions. They enjoy watching the ordinary things of life. An old treasure-seeking grandfather seen earlier stops to talk about life but goes away angry that they find his philosophy amusing. Farfadet is certain that Eudoxie wants him, but is happy also to be summoned Brigade Headquarters, as a typist. He is saved and envied.

Chapters 4-6 Analysis

Chapter 4, "Volpatte and Fouillade," illustrates the confusion that reigns in the French Army and introduces a new character, Eudoxie, a beautiful refuge of whom several squad members become enamored. Volpatte and Fouillade are pulled off the front, told to defend a stinking shell hole en route to their new assignment, and are then forgotten. Members of the 204th stumble on them, report it, and orders come to fall back. Two Germans stumble over them in the same way, are taken prisoner, and turned over to the 204th.

Cpl. Bertrand, meanwhile, worries that his men are missing and sends out rescuers: Farfadet and the narrator. They find Volpatte with his head wrapped in bloody bandages, but happy to have suffered a "good wound" that will put him in a comfortable hospital and let him see his family. The others envy him. This is a common wish at the front, because survival is the men's only object. Volpatte and Fuillade tell of helping "slang" Sgt. Sacerdote out of "shell shock" when they find him in a nearby hole. Shell

shock is now called "Post Traumatic Shock Syndrome" (PTSS) and is taken far more seriously than in World War I.

Finally, as they walk out of the forest, the men see beautiful Eudoxie, with giant Lamuse tracking her. He breaks off to help carry his comrades' gear, loads himself down, and has frequently to adjust the load. Having been likened to a wild boar, sticking his red snout through the bushes while on Eudoxie's trail, he now turns into a comical "moving heap." Lamuse' obsessive/compulsive behavior continues to develop going forward.

In Chapter 5, "Sanctuary," the regiment takes up residence in Gauchin-l'Abbé, a village in the Pas du Calais in the far North of France. It begins with a detailed, impressionistic description of a grueling march by day and night, which passes into a fierce competition for sleeping space, showing both the quartermasters' ineptitude and disdain for the ordinary poilus. Lamuse emerges as a surprisingly good negotiator with an angry woman, Palmyra, who ends up renting to the squad for 20 sous per day and allowing them to use her kitchen. Lamuse even gets her to reveal her illegal hoard of wine.

The men are depicted grumbling about the thriving black market while finding themselves "damned well off," under a roof and eating at a table, which seems to be the greatest treat. They talk about inflated prices, about how the army is cracking down on plundering civilians, and about how other units are fairing. Flies suddenly begin swarming, a symbol of the diversity of misery, along with spiders indoors. An unnamed old man found picking through garbage returns later in the story.

The narrator and Lamuse go for a stroll, which allows a broader view of the sprawling army camp. As they watch an airplane fly over, Lamuse predicts that they will never be practical. The narrator finds this attitude narrow but says nothing. The sense that he is intellectually superior to his comrades is growing—perhaps meaning that he has at some point been an officer or at least a non-com, and the fight with another non-com has cost him his rank—but still he gives nothing away. The feeling that he must eventually reveal his past is constant, but it is never satisfied.

Lamuse is certain that Eudoxie is following him in particular and he intends to marry her. At a white-painted "stomatological" van, Blaire talks himself into getting his remaining teeth pulled, a concern that he expresses when first encountered in the novel. When the men encounter Eudoxie, Lamuse declares his feelings and tries to kiss her, but she fights him off and stalks away. The narrator likens dejected Lamuse to poor Cyclops in the ancient legends, "a huge toy, a thing of derision." He rarely uses literary allusions. Passing the perimeter guards, the men hear complaints about civilians coming and going and about the ugly local women. Pépère is the talk of camp and town, having been transferred to the rear to serve as a typist. His comrades, of course, envy him. Biquet receives a letter from his mother and laughs about her outdated concern about cold and mud: "We're all right now." There is no more to be said than that: survival minute-to-minute. This event is poignantly recalled near the end of the novel when Biquet is killed.

Chapter 6, "Habits," depicts the men spending their 17th and final day of leisure, hoping that, like some other units, they may not have to return to the war on schedule. They languidly watch chickens in the yard, each seeing different things: Paradis sees a bad omen, while Blaire sees the joy of a brief life. Passing ducks, an orchard, a meadow, and gardens filled with the music of working bees all evoke life. The treasure-seeking grandfather joins them briefly, talks of the women of his youth, and how now only money concerns him. He goes away angry that they find his philosophy amusing. Farfadet joins them, looking happy. While certain that Eudoxie desires a rendezvous with him, he too has been called to Brigade Headquarters as a typist. He is thus saved. The men envy him.

Chapters 7-9

Chapters 7-9 Summary

Chapter 7 opens next day on a railway platform, as the squad prepares to be "thrown" elsewhere. They leave Gauchin-l'Abbé at night, without farewells and find this new town a labyrinth of platforms, buildings, and military vehicles. It rumbles and vibrates. Guns and ammunition are being loaded. Everything, even horses, is camouflaged. Soldiers flow into the station from all directions and are wedged in to wait. As darkness falls again, lights go on, bringing clarity of detail. Cocon bores his comrades with details about the organization and make-up of the 39 corps present, each consisting of four divisions and having a specialization and unique equipment. A cart crashes into the men, wanting to pass, but there is nowhere for them to move.

In Chapter 8 Eudore narrates how he has spent his six-day leave. His wife, Mariette, lives in the hamlet of Villers-l'Abbaye and runs a café. They have not see one another in 15 months. She is to go to his parents home in Mont-St-Eloi, but fails to arrive. The parents are annoyed as he sits watching for her. On the last day, he races to Villers through driving rain. At the station he meets five "old cronies," who follow him home. The road to Vauvelles, their destination, is washed out and at a nearby farm they are turned away by police guard into a makeshift POW camp. Back at Eudore's small house, the others want to leave, to give the couple privacy, but neither will hear of it. They sit around the walls and talk. In the morning, Mariette serves café customers and is gracious to the soldiers who are sorry to have been in the way. Husband and wife get a half-minute kiss before he has to run. She gives him ham, bread, and wine for the road, which he shares with his friends.

Chapter 9, shows the wounded Volpatte's return after two months' sick leave, with ears "stuck on again," livid about his experiences in the rear. Long knowing the danger of his holding anger in, the friends coax out Volpatte's story, while they eat under another driving rain, after a morning spent digging a deep trench. At first Volpatte can only repeat, "There are too many of them," but begins elaborating: every depot swarms with men, spruced up, enjoying the high life, claiming to have "been in the war," but doing everything necessary to avoid the front. He describes at length the shenanigans of one "reptile" in the Expenses Department, but gets some opposition from buddies when he lays into the police.

Volpatte continues: in a big room in a Depot office, people swarm as in a market, talking. He requests to return to his regiment but is ignored by angry, self-important people. Squad members chime in with favorite stories about shirkers until Volpatte resumes: for two days he helps in a kitchen, from which he hears much nonsense from gentlemen as they gorge themselves, inventing excuses for avoiding the front. One sees his own bad luck in three friends who were supposed to assist him being killed by the enemy. Another sees his intellect as being more valuable to France than his back. They gossip about those absent: the temperamental, imbecilic commandant; the over-

zealous general who is dying; people who volunteers to slaughter cattle and mend roads rather than fight. All are jealous of some Parisian named Bourin who before the war spends long days socializing but now must look after his health, safe in the south. Volpatte, hearing this, thinks of a comrade killed beside him on Hill 132.

These gentlemen take care not to touch Volpatte, who is "war-mucky." He hates that they use the poilus' phrase, "if we do return," to which they have no right. That is a decoration to be earned, not discussed while enjoying life. There are hundreds of thousands of these. It chokes Volpatte. War Minister Alexandre Millerand in 1914 had promised that there would be no shirkers, but, as Cocon observes, there are 250 non-fighters per regiment performing all manner of support services. Tulacque remarks that those who drive the artillery pieces to Verdun face danger only once, not every day. One cannot consider them to be truly in the war. Otherwise, civilians in Paris who are accidentally wounded must be considered warriors. Being unluckily killed or luckily staying alive are not the same, as death lasts a long time.

Tirette tells a lighter story about an official who demands of a woman with a mustache why she is not at the front. Pépin agrees with Volpatte that shirking is human nature, but it is annoying when shirkers act pretentiously. Even engagés who never face the machine gun should not be able later to brag of having served voluntarily. Bertrand reminds them that duty and danger are the same when defending justice and liberty. It ought to be the common duty of all. The necessary support services should be performed only by the truly weak and old. In 1914, those who had talked most about patriotism did the most to save themselves from fighting. He recalls Margoulin, a good sort who constantly talks about protesting, but never says a thing and is killed. Volpatte concludes: one would have to turn the great rivers of France into the depots to cleans them; meanwhile, people live there peacefully and happily, while the poilus keep vigil in misery.

Chapters 7-9 Analysis

Chapter 7, "Entraining," depicts the massive effort involved in moving the French Army. Che description is highly impressionistic: lights, sounds, motions as men and matériel are thrown together and made to wait. Cocon, the squad's "Man of Figures," provides the reader an over-abundance of detail about the organization of the French Army.

In Chapter 8, "On Leave," Eudore, the squad's self-proclaiming "martyr," tells how he has spent his six-day leave apart from his comrades, seeing his wife for the first time in 15 months. The men are well-acquainted with Mariette's face from a photograph and immediately begin to jibe him about presumed sex. He corrects them, telling of wasting most of his time with his parents, waiting for Mariette to arrive at their home, and then braving a terrible storm to see her for one night. Any intimacy is thwarted by five "old cronies," whom they put up when they cannot continue to their own destination. Husband and wife get a half-minute kiss before he has to run. He shares with his friends at the front the provisions that Mariette packs for him. Eudore's story is unusually poignant, a testimony to love and esprit de corps.

Chapter 9, "The Anger of Volpatte," shows his return after two months' sick leave, with ears "stuck on again," livid about his experience in the rear. Heretofore he has been shown coughing and lamenting about being sure to "kick the bucket" soon. His buddies, knowing the danger of Volpatte's holding anger in, coax out his story. It emerges in two installments, the first while the squad eats under yet another driving rain after a morning spent digging a deep trench, and the second relaxing against a stone wall. At first Volpatte can only repeat, "There are too many of them," but soon elaborates on a theme that has been thus far merely touched upon: the phenomenon of "shirkers."

War Minister Alexandre Millerand in 1914 had promised that there would be no shirkers, but as Cocon observes, there are 250 non-fighters per regiment performing all manner of support services. Volpatte vividly portrays the swarms of men, spruced up and enjoying the high life in the rear, avoiding the front by various means, and still claiming to be in the war. Volpatte insists—and his comrades heartily agree—that those who do not face danger every day deserve to call themselves soldiers. They admit that shirking is human nature, and are annoyed only at those who act pretentiously. Everyone should take equal part in the defense of justice and liberty and support services should be performed by those truly too weak or old to fight.

Volpatte concludes with a striking image: one would have to turn the four great rivers of France, the Seine, the Garonne, the Rhône, and the Loire, into the teeming rear-echelon depots to cleanse them. Meanwhile, people live there peacefully and happily, while the poilus keep vigil in misery. The chapter ends enigmatically, when an unidentified speaker disagrees with Cocon's assertion that none of the things that they have been debating makes one want to die.

Chapters 10-12

Chapters 10-12 Summary

In Chapter 10, the narrator is shown the spot on which A. Cajard, a veteran of the trenches since August 1914, is executed earlier in the day as an example to others, for seeking not to go back. His executioners recall the ceremonial and write protests on the post against which Cajard is shot. Returning to quarters, the narrator finds Volpatte telling anecdotes.

Chapter 11 takes place under a violent rainstorm. The squad huddles inside the collapsing barn in which they are lodging during a rest period, watching Fouillade take a shower-bath under the downpour. They believe that he will be "carpeted" for the shell hole affair with Volpatte. Afterward, Fouillade regrets bathing, for the wind rushes through the rickety barn, which the poilus have plugged as best they can, but to little effect. There is little to do but stretch out in the stinking straw of their beds. There is no way to build a fire, while a newspaper claims that the poilus have everything that they need. Everyone curses.

Labri, another squad's mascot, visits. The mongrel sheep dog is sick and refuses to eat. Its master beats and ignores it. Its depressed gaze looks like Fouillade's, who dreams vividly of his beautiful native land, L'Hérault, on the Mediterranean. Remembering how he had played soldiers as a child, he now regrets it. His wife Clémence still lives there. Fouillade wonders if he will ever return. As he returns to the present, all share stories of their homes, bragging about their specialties, and inviting one another to visit. Fouillade races out in search of wine, only to run into Cpl. Broyer, who is summoning all to morning parade, during which an officer announces a 5-8 PM curfew, when the general is out and about. The weather worsens in the afternoon. They pace in the confined space to avoid stiffness.

At 5 PM, Fouillade runs out into the night for wine, imagining Magnac's Inn back home, and realizing that he lacks enough money for a liter. His comrades will not help. The multitude of taverns in the center of town are full of helmeted men, but Fouillade recognizes no one. Reluctantly, he uses his last coins to buy a pint of white wine. Finishing it, he vainly searches other taverns for a friend and returns to the barn. He pets Labri before going to his pile of hay. Another wasted day is over. Fouillade wonders how many more he will endure.

Chapter 12, focuses on Poterloo, a native of Souchez, just down the Béthune Road from where the squad has been digging trenches for six months. Poterloo is anxious to see it again and the narrator accompanies him. At first, they enjoy a thick, protective fog. The trees that Poterloo remembers are uprooted and burned, the road disfigured, and shattered corpses are lined up along it, waiting for the safety of darkness to be carried to the cemetery. The narrator reads a letter near one mangled body, wishing the victim a happy birthday. The atmosphere is sickening. Territorial stretcher-bearers bring

a new, freshly-dressed body, remarking that the man dies just two hours earlier while looking for a souvenir German rifle to take home on leave. The young face gives an appearance of being less dead but more pathetic than the others.

Poterloo and the narrator continue walking towards the village. They pass through refuse, both French and German, military and civilian, while carefully watching for unexploded shells. Poterloo recognizes the remains of The Red Tavern, outside of which a gristly German corpse is propped. As the fog lifts, gunfire increases. Souchez has disappeared more completely than any ruined village they have seen. Amidst stinking human and animal remains, they find a freshly-killed "dinner-fatigue man" and record his name for retrieval. Poterloo is like a sleep-walker, despairing. He tells the narrator about good old times in The Red Tavern. He pictures the lost happiness of his own vanished home. The are the only living beings in an "unreal and miasmal place."

Heading back to camp, Poterloo talks about his wife, Clotilde, aged 26, and little daughter, who live with his relatives in nearby Lens. He had seen them 20 days earlier while laying wire along "The Toboggan." They come upon three Alsatian Germans, whom they allow to bury their dead and listen to their grousing about the war and their officers. Poterloo on a whim impersonates a German officer to reach Lens, which is intact. He finds Clotilde smiling naturally at a German officer, "a great striped simpleton," and his daughter climbing on the enemy's lap. Poterloo also recognizes Madeleine Vandaërt, whose husband, Poterloo's friend, has recently died at Marne. She too, though in mourning, is smiling. Poterloo flees, stumbling, furious at the obvious betrayal. Only with difficulty does he refrain from killing Clotilde, but he also understands her need to live well. He realizes that she would marry again if he dies in the war, but he intends to survive and be part of the postwar rebuilding, physical and emotional. The Germans will do the same.

Poterloo's mood brightens as he philosophizes, describing notable eccentrics from prewar Souchez who will return to the old ways. Everything will be remade, better. Poterloo meditates on he revival. Back in the communication trench it is dry and sunny. The narrator admires the fine work that they have put into its digging. Spring is coming and he and Poterloo feel uplifted, sure that the war will end in this beautiful season and life will return to normal.

The squad is eating when they rejoin it before preparing to leave, their four-day assignment finished. Rain returns for the nighttime march. The narrator walks with smiling Poterloo. They trudge on, slipping ever downhill. A terrible explosion shakes them and the narrator sees Poterloo go suddenly stiff, with "a flame in the place of his head."

Chapters 10-12 Analysis

Brief Chapter 10, "Argoval," finds the narrator at the spot where earlier in the day a veteran is executed as an example to others. His executioners talk about him. Two accomplices in seeking to avoid returning to the trenches are given life in prison

because they do not have a prior criminal record. The victim had once as a civilian gotten drunk in public, but never been seen drunk in the Army. In order to underscore the contrast with Volpatte's earlier grousing about useless bureaucracy, the narrator finds him back in the barracks telling anecdotes.

Chapter 11, "The Dog," focuses on one squad member, Fouillade. It opens with a depiction of life in a collapsing barn during a driving rainstorm. The dog for whom the chapter is named is a maltreated mascot from another squad. Like the humans, it is waiting to die and its face mirrors Fouillade's depression. For a second time in the novel, squad members curse newspaper stories that praise the comfort provided to the poilus. The story then shifts to Fouillade's vivid memories of his beautiful native land, L'Hérault, on the Mediterranean coast. In particular, he recalls Magnac's Inn and goes out into the storm to enjoy some wine. It is determined at length that Fouillade has few friends in the squad and little money in his pocket, so he drinks but little before heading back to the barn.

The story contains several minor vignettes worth noting. The unnamed town in Northern France has not been destroyed. There are taverns every 20 paces in the center of town, enjoying a brisk trade among soldiers. The general has, oddly, ordered a three-hour curfew every day while he is out and about. It is ignored. The next chapter will depict the total destruction of a similar town. The conclusion of this chapter also stands in sharp contrast with that of the next. Fouillade returns to the barn, pets Labri, and wonders how many more wasted days he will endure. Chapter 12's hero reaches his final day.

Chapter 12, "The Doorway," focuses on Poterloo, heretofore of minor importance. He comes from Souchez in the Nord-Pas-de-Calais region of France, just down the Béthune Road from where the squad has been digging trenches for six months. The Germans have withdrawn but continue shelling it. Poterloo takes the narrator along on a "pilgrimage of peril." The images of horror, seen through the eyes of someone who remembers the splendor of the village and its surroundings, are as stark as anything yet depicted. Corpses are stacked along the road awaiting burial. Another catalog of what shells do to the human body contrasts with the description of a body freshly cleaned up for burial. The cleansed young face gives an appearance of being less dead but more pathetic than the others. Pathos is added by having someone mention that he dies two hours earlier while looking for a German souvenir to take home on leave.

New horrors await as they enter what used to be the village of Souchez. Poterloo and the narrator are the only living beings in an "unreal and miasmal place." Porterloo recognizes the remains of The Red Tavern but nothing else. Amidst stinking human and animals remains, they find a freshly-killed "dinner-fatigue man" and humanely pause to record his name for retrieval. Poterloo recalls the lost happiness of his own vanished home.

The story shifts suddenly as Poterloo talks about seeing his wife, Clotilde, and little daughter just 20 days earlier. On a whim Poterloo had impersonated a German officer to reach Lens, his family's village, which is utterly intact, serving as a German military center. Poterloo flees when he sees his wife and another woman talking pleasantly with

the enemy. He talks out with the narrator his conflicting feelings, which include betrayal and understanding. Clotilde must look out for her and her child's welfare. He realizes that Clotilde would remarry if widowed, but he intends to survive and be part of the postwar rebuilding. Poterloo's mood brightens as he philosophizes about everything being remade better.

As Poterloo and the narrator reach the the communication trench, the sky is sunny. Spring is coming and he and Poterloo feel uplifted, sure that the war will end in this beautiful season and life will return to normal. Having finished its assignment, the squad moves out, again at night and again under a driving rain. Despite the discomfort, Poterloo smiles and seems upbeat—until his head is dramatically blown away.

Chapters 13-15

Chapters 13-15 Summary

In Chapter 13 Barque asks the narrator about what he is writing, wonders whether the characters will speak naturally or if "big words" will be put in their mouths. The narrator insists that big words tell the truth and he is not worried by what people will say.

Chapter 14 finds the squad in yet another huge barn on eve of another return to the trenches. First Volpatte and then the other men examine and discuss the things that they carry in his pockets and debate how best to pack for the road. An adjutant suggests that they are about to face "a hot time of it." The men talk about meager wages and means of augmenting them. Everything that the Army issues them is ugly and of low quality. The men are too proud of their "treasures" to lighten the crushing load of what they carry. Marthereau remarks that no one in strict Cpl. Bertrand's squad is inclined to get drunk before returning to the trenches, while in a neighboring barn, the men eject two drunkards. At 10 p.m., Bertrand orders sleep, but "jabbering" persists while they try to get comfortable. Gradually, peace and darkness descend. The narrator awakens at 2 a.m. as a cock crows. Cocon, also awakened, calculates what the 17-man squad has consumed since formation and recalls the 47 villages in which they have quartered. The narrator dreams of a "great unknown light."

Chapter 15 shows the regiment hungry, thirsty, and in bare quarters, without even a match to light their pipes. Tirloir lets them use his petrol pipe lighter until it runs out of fuel. The narrator then produces a box of matches, which he gives to Paradis, who is then thronged. In return, Paradis gives him an egg.

Chapters 13-15 Analysis

In the mere two pages of Chapter 13, "The Big Words," it is revealed that the narrator is recording notes for a book about the war, which he intends to publish. Intelligent-looking Barque wonders whether the characters will speak naturally or have "big words" put in their mouths to avoid censorship. The narrator insists that big words can also tell the truth and claims not worried by what his sort of people will say. This is the strongest indication thus far that the narrator stands apart from his comrades in social background and education. Barque then observes that the narrator is too polite and refrains from drinking brandy, using it instead to wash his scalp.

Long Chapter 14, "Of Burdens," finds the squad in yet another huge barn on eve of yet another return to the trenches. It deals with the large quantity of "treasures" that the men carry with them, despite the weight it adds to the burden of equipment that they are required carry from place to place. Each time that they reach a destination, the poilus swear to rid themselves of things, but when they march again, everything remains

intact. The chapter reveals additional character quirks and reiterates that Volpatte, around whom the opening revolves, is not well-liked and is considered crazy.

Each poilu "carries his crowd along" in worn photographs. Cocon calculates that there are 18 pockets among the squad members, who wager against him, but a physical count proves him correct. The men debate how best to carry one's drinking cup and the best size for a cup, before turning to ways of augmenting their starvation wages, primarily by stealing. The narrator observes that everything that the Army issues them is ugly and of low quality. Barque demonstrates how best to pack and carry 200-cartridge pouches, and they discuss the identifying marks they add to their rifles in order to keep the lazy and dishonest from exchanging a dirty rifle for one newly cleaned. Marthereau remarks that no one in their squad is inclined to get drunk, even though they are headed to the trenches. No one talks about the front either.

Ordered to be quiet and sleep, the men continue chatting about trivial matters—a Marist Brother serving in the hospital and the commandant's ignorance of how to smoke a pipe without scorching it—before peace and darkness descend. The Marist brother returns in a tragic scene later in the novel. A cock crows at 2 a.m., allowing Cocon to calculate what the 17-man squad has consumed since formation and recall the 47 villages in which they have quartered. The narrator contemplates this barnful of men before falling asleep again and dreams of a "great unknown light."

Three-paged Chapter 15, "The Egg," establishes that the entire regiment has run out of supplies. Men have eaten and drunk virtually all of the emergency provisions that they are required to carry (documented in the previous chapter) and have been provided only one skimpy meal in two days. A scrawny stray cat is rumored to have become some squad's dinner. Most troubling, they lack matches to light their pipes. Normally-angry Tirloir ("The Grumbler") shares his petrol lighter until it runs out of fuel. Out of nowhere, the narrator produces a box of matches, which he gives to Paradis, who hands him an egg. Recall that in Gauchin-l'Abbé, Paradis had seen a bad omen in a hen that marches around the yard followed by her chicks. "The Egg" is even more enigmatic than "The Big Words," enticing the reader onward in search of answers. The lack of matches and dining on stray animals is reprised in Chapter 18, "A Box of Matches."

Chapters 16-19

Chapters 16-19 Summary

Chapter 16, "An Idyll," finds the regiment in a new village, with Volpatte, Paradis, and the narrator investigating lights in the farm house. Paradis insists on taking cleaning and polishing shoes for an old woman's daughter, working with evident pride and face alive. He goes to sleep with a happy smile still on his face. Chapter 17, "In the Sap," focuses on depressed Lamuse volunteering for dangerous duty, digging with the sappers, and racing back in horror when Eudoxie's moldy corpse fall on him while digging. Moving her out of the way, he hugs her as he had always wanted.

Chapter 18, "A Box of Matches," finds Blaire, Poupardin, and Pépin blackened with smoke, looking at their extinguished fire and having no means of relighting it to cook the fine flank of horse they have obtained. As a new cook, Blaire is anxious to show himself capable under any circumstances, emulating the late, great Martin César. Poupardin leads the foraging, heading through the trenches towards the 10th. Two Moroccans meet them, begging tobacco, then a half-sleeping sentry gives them directions. They walk downhill for a long time, seeing no one in the crumbling trench. Then, hearing footsteps, they hide in a "funk-hole," which they discover is German. They kill the lone sentry and before fleeing relieve him of booty, including matches. As they race back, a sentry orders them to halt, amazed that they are running from the direction of the German lines. They realize that the earlier sentry had steered them wrong into the "International Trench," half-French and half-German, with no signs marking the beginning and ends of the neutral zone. The men hurry to light the cooking fire, happy to have such a good story to tell later.

Chapter 19, "Bombardment," finds the men trekking like "wandering survivors" across flat country under a light snow. They pass through Ablain-Saint-Nazaire, which lies in ruins, and advance cautiously on a nearby occupied hillock, taking turns carrying heavy planks and hurdles. A rocket shell lights the sky and detonates, showing French and German lines a half mile ahead and a hundred yards apart. from there is the first line. Entering the communication trench, they drop their loads and the bombardment intensifies over Hill 119. The men talk about the sounds and destructiveness of various kinds of weapons and watch both sides' reconnaissance "sausages" (balloons) overhead. The appearance of a mass of wooly green sends them looking for gas masks and debating the idea of "fair" in war. As they talk, the "avalanche of fire and iron" continues to build.

The men again move out, not knowing where. The sound of French artillery grows more active, signifying that an offensive is underway. They halt, coming upon a field, where bullets continue ripping into a row of mown-down soldiers. As rockets whistle overhead, the order comes to clear the trench. They fall back to the telephone station, where an artillery observer sends aiming instructions. The narrator sees far off in the ruined fields tiny dots of human beings whose time to fight has come. Another time and it will his.

The squad is moved to rearward shelters, where the "familiar noises of life" reign rather than that of "universal destruction."

Chapters 16-19 Analysis

Chapter 16, "An Idyll," finds the regiment arriving by night in a new village. The narrator walks with Paradis, who is particularly worn out after serving as liaison man while the others sleep and carrying a fantastically-swollen knapsack. The village is described felicitously as "drawn in white chalk and heavy strokes of black upon the blue paper of the sky." As they always do, a non-com announces, "We're there," which opens a period in which everyone competes for sleeping space. Volpatte, Paradis, and the narrator investigate lights in the farm house. A threadbare refugee, who sits inside, has no drinks to offer them. A shriveled old lady sits in a dark corner, cleaning her dressmaker daughter's heavy boots. Paradis insists on taking over, cleaning and polishing them with pride. His face comes alive. When he is finished, the old woman summons Josephine to see, but Paradis insists that they leave. Back in their crib, Paradis yawns with a happy smile on his face.

Chapter 17, "In the Sap," opens with mail call and a newspaper story about "the weasel-faced ancient at Gauchin" having his yard bombed, which turns up the treasure chest he had always bragged about. At the mention of this town, Faradet daydreams of Eudoxie. Lamuse alone volunteers to help the sappers (military engineers who work with mines, both laying and removing them). He has been melancholy since Eudoxie's rebuff and rarely speaks. Later that evening, Lamuse runs into the trench, yelling for help. He refuses wine before telling the narrator in a low voice, as if in church, that he has seen Eudoxie again, a moldy corpse, unearthed during the digging. Moving her out of the way, he hugs her as he had always wanted.

Chapter 18, "A Box of Matches," opens with Blaire, Poupardin, and Pépin worrying about how to cook some horse meat that they have obtained. Volpatte brings more wood, but they have no means of lighting it. As a new cook, Blaire is anxious to show himself capable under any circumstances, emulating the late, great Martin César, lauded earlier in the novel. Poupardin leads the foraging, obtaining directions from a half-sleeping sentry. A half -hour later, hearing footsteps, they hide in a "funk-hole," which to their surprise is German. They kill the lone sentry and, before fleeing, relieve him of booty, including matches. A French sentry, amazed that they are running from the direction of the German lines, explains that the earlier sentry must have steered them wrong into the "International Trench," half-French and half-German, with no sign of the neutral zone. The men hurry to light the cooking fire, happy to have such a good story to tell later.

Chapter 19, "Bombardment," intensifies the story. The squad treks like "wandering survivors" across flat country under a light snow and cautiously advance on a hillock, which shows "the lively movement of human beings." Much is made of pairs of men taking turns carrying heavy planks and hurdles, whose purpose is not revealed but appear to be tools of the trade. By this point in the novel it is clear that the French Army

does much that makes little sense. As they approach the French and German lines, which are about 100 yards apart, rocket shells light the sky and the men not carrying the burdens look up and admire the beautiful fireworks.

Dawn turns everything dirty and mournful. When they reach the communication trench, the bombardment intensifies. The narrator sees no beauty, but rather describes "sickly heads of Medusæ with points of fire" and "ostrich feathers" over Hill 119. He evokes Moses' pillars of cloud and pillars of fire in the desert of Sinai, which in France men dive underground to avoid. Squad members calmly describe the danger of various guns. Although Blesois is killed by shrapnel days earlier, they believe that 77 mm shells burst too high to harm them—provided one does not stand up and gawk about. Explosions nearby from 150 mm howitzers raise dust in the shape of dragons and volcanic plumes.

The narrator shifts to the use of military slang. As the artillery apparently runs out of ammunition, "coffee-mills" (machine guns) begin rattling from the French line. Sixteen "sausages" (reconnaissance balloons) float overhead, representing both sides. The men applaud when a 75 mm battery opens fire behind them, followed by a 220 mm shell that sounds like a passing train. The men debate how big the deadly shells must be to be seen on the fly. One can tell the strength by the displacement of air that hits the ear. When a mass of woolly green hovers, the men prepare to don gas masks. Barque laughs at the idea of "fairness" in war. They talk about the danger of hissing fuses long after the shell's explosion, .German and Austrian shells that cannot be dodged—and naval guns that are even worse. A new sergeant brings tales from Verdun, where "whopper" guns (380s, 420s, and 244s) send bodies flying 15 yards, explode entire houses, and litter fields like rocks for months on end. Bertrand explains seemingly insane activity in the distance: gunners searching the craters for fuses that indicate the shell's direction and range. The men talk about the sounds and trajectories of various kinds of artillery ("torpedoes," "turtle-doves," and "mortar-toads"). With "dud" shells (French and German) lying everywhere, Lamuse wonders what will happen when farmers resume farming. As the men talk, the "avalanche of fire and iron" continues to build. Modern warfare is encapsulated in this section.

The men again move out, not knowing where, because they are a small cog in a huge machine and the brass does not want to spook them ahead of time. They halt, coming upon a field where bullets continue ripping into a row of mowed-down soldiers. Even the dead cannot lie in peace. The narrator comments that far off in the ruined fields are tiny dots of human beings whose time to fight has come. Another time and it will he his. The squad is moved to rearward shelters, where the "familiar noises of life" reign rather than that of "universal destruction." This is the quiet before the storm.

Chapter 20

Chapter 20 Summary

Chapter 20, opens with Bertrand rudely awakening the narrator at 2 a.m. to assume guard duty. Rifle shots crackle and a bullet hits nearby. Beyond the lines of barbed wire, the French line descends from a ravine into a dark, silent abyss. It is cold, windy, and gloomy. At dawn comes a lull. Corpses fill the trench like logs: Lamuse, Barque, Biquet, and Eudore, killed four nights before while on patrol with Bertrand, André Mesnil, and the narrator, searching for a new German listening post. Sappers recover the bodies. Joseph Mesnil goes out into "No Man's Land" in a vain search for his brother. The corpses seem monstrous to their comrades but a mere nuisance to those who have not known them. The narrator rejoins the reduced squad. Tirloir and Tulacque are both in the hospital with diseases. Conversations continue unchanged.

The squad is not pulled back from the front after the usual four days, and there are rumors and concrete signs of a coming offensive. All are sure that despondent Joseph will jump in front of a bullet soon, having lost three brothers before André. The squad choses to believe that André is a POW, but Paradis has seen the body and takes the narrator to see it, far nearer the trench than the teams have searched. Joseph wanders by daily to throw away the food he cannot stand to eat, be never notices the stench. Back at headquarters, men play cards and gripe. Tirette and Paradis recall an evil major in training camp who quells a rebellion by eating evil soup to prove it is fit. Shortly afterwards, his wife begins vomiting— The story is cut short by a call to arms. The roar of gunfire is deafening. Officers issue conflicting orders, and simple men, torn out of their normal lives, prepare to throw themselves over the top to face merciless machine guns. If they survive, they must kill. Their silence communicates fear and farewell. The wait seems eternal.

In the morning, new orders and rumors arrive. Bertrand leads select squad members out in a mass. Amazingly, no bullets fly as they descend the slope, until they cross the barbed wire. Then a curtain of fire from the sky—"barrage fire"—cuts them off from past and future. The poilus move forward at a run, dodging the dead and dying, seeking the undefended and crumbling International Trench. Barrage fire continues behind them, but on the heights they are theoretically safe, but snipers pick off the officers. A common soldier orders the race forward resumed. The long-feared machine guns open up at 50 yards, but the French plunge ahead, hearing nothing. Volpatte sprints forward repeating, "Don't worry." People die at random. Survivors head for the clearing in the barbed wire blasted by the French artillery. The token German defenders fire over their heads and disappear into funk-holes. Smoke obscures everything as hand-to-hand combat begins. Suddenly the battle ends, leaving a river of corpses flowing through the trench. Blaire gives a savage cry, throwing bombs into funk-holes. Another man caves in a hole. No one seems to be the person he had been shortly before. All are intoxicated with themselves, anxious for more action, and consider the "luck of their survival" to be glory. When a German machine gun resumes firing, Joseph Mesnil runs toward it and is cut

down. The narrator and Paradis sit together as the uproar and emotions lessen. Finally, the infinite waiting resumes.

The Germans abandon their dead everywhere and many are taken prisoners. As night falls, men squat together but rarely speak. They begin to think. Stretcher bearers run about and burial squads dig. Bertrand assigns the narrator and Paradis to sentry duty. Two poilus pass by, bragging about their heroism, because no one at home will believe them. Bertrand joins in, saying this has been necessary for the future. He declares that only Liebknecht has gotten it right—the future must wipe out the shameful present with all of its soldiers and victims. Bertrand laughs at having once kidded about believing in prophecies. The narrator says softly that he believes likewise and is ordered to go to his post.

The morning is frigid, dark, and deadly silent. A covering of snow turns everything ghost-like. When their relief comes, the narrator and Paradis head back to sleep, but the communication trenches are full of newcomers from the 5th Battalion, preparing to enter the same hell that the squad has just endured. There is talk of seizing the villas of von Hindenburg and Glücks, of future poilus now five years old, of "great" Napoleon and "stinking" Wilhelm. Marthereau declares all poilu unlucky and stupid.

The narrator accompanies the badly-wounded Joseph Mesnil to a refuge and is order to tell Bertrand, if he sees him, to get back quickly, for the captain is impatient. Volpatte joins them shortly before they come upon Pépin's burial detail. Pépin had invaded a German funk-hole without telling anyone and died when the French gassed it. Moving on, they look out on "an amazing charnel-house," a field of corpses being processed. Shattered bone fragments and rags survive from May, while from last night's slaughter, German and French corpses putrefy together. Discovering Cocon's severed head, they are speechless. There are too few survivors. The dead, by giving all of their strength, have a certain vague grandeur. Rats are consuming the bodies and sometimes die among them of poisoning. They next find Bertrand's grotesque body. Always tranquil in life, he appears to be stretched out like a cross and laughing. They arrange the body, take his papers, and summarize him as "a good sort" whom they truly need. Volpatte returns to tell the squad the bad news, asking Joseph to keep in touch.

Joseph and the narrator descend through "The Zouaves' Cells," shelters dug in May by these colorfully-dressed volunteers. Now they are skeletons. Reaching the International Trench, they find it choking with Germans overtaken by death when an earthen barricade blocks their retreat. Scattered religious tokens make the narrator think of the "Valley of Death." A passing soldier tells them that the Germans had tried "the white flag trick," and the resulting French butchery is gruesomely evident. They come upon Papa Remure, bandaged and waiting for evacuation. Doubting that he will last until evening, he wants to make his life's confession to the narrator, who promises to return after getting Joseph to his destination. As they enter Trench 97, shrapnel bursts overhead and burrow into the hill. Joseph is filled with futility and hatred. The narrator wants to fetch Remure, but he has vanished. During a lull, they and the stretcher-bearers race. The narrator recalls Poterloo's flaming death as they pass a wounded man, "a sort of screaming tree."

The narrator and Joseph arrive at their original line. The narrator gives Euterpe, the cyclist, Biquet's letters, including an unsent one to his mother, written at Gauchin-l'Abbé one splendid afternoon. He had laughed at her worrying about danger. Joseph breathes fitfully, observing that the narrator and the others must go back. For this they must be very strong.

Chapter 20 Analysis

Seemingly endless Chapter 20, "Under Fire," depicts trench warfare at its worst. Many of the novel's characters die or are sent off to hospital. It begins placidly enough, with Bertrand sending the narrator off to 2 a.m. sentry duty, advising him to keep his "eye skinned." The narrator describes the scene beyond the lines of French barbed wire as a ravine descending into a dark, silent abyss. It is cold, windy, and gloomy. He sees other watchers along the sandbagged trench, illumined by rockets. He and his neighbor converse and investigate a nearby rifle flash; a poilu is over-anxious and fires at nothing. He is confused to hear a watch ticking nearby. This detail becomes significant later. As shots ring out for real, accompanied by grenade blasts, clouds cover the moon, and the sentries scurry back to their loopholes.

Dawn brings a lull during which the narrator considers the log pile of corpses that four days ago had been his friends: Lamuse, Barque, Biquet, and Eudore, killed on patrol with Bertrand, André Mesnil, and the narrator, searching for a new German listening post. Sappers recover the bodies and pile them up. The corpses seem monstrous to their comrades but a mere nuisance to those who had not known them. Joseph Mesnil goes out into "No Man's Land" in a vain search for his brother.

When the narrator rejoins the surviving squad members, he summarizes their current appearance and behavior, much as in the second chapter. Tirloir and Tulacque have gone to the hospital with diseases, Blaire has grown elegant to match his new teeth, and the others are largely unchanged. The review is handled briefly enough to be useful but not ponderous. Soon there will be more gaps in the squad. Significantly, given all that they have endured, conversations remain the same.

Not everything stays the same, however. The squad is not pulled back from the front after four days and there are both rumors and concrete signs of a coming offensive. Joseph's losing three brothers besides André in other battles is discussed. Fearing that he will jump in front of a bullet, his friends pretend that André is a POW. The men are shown griping at Bertrand about food, showing how busy and systematic he is, before Paradis takes the narrator aside to show him André's body near an abandoned loophole. Recall that in "The Egg," Paradis also finds something that no one else can. André lies far closer to the trench than the teams had searched. The narrator and Paradis speculate on how André may have died, given the position he is in. Such macabre considerations grow commonplace as the gory chapter advances. The narrator recalls hearing André's wristwatch. Looking frail, Joseph wanders up and passes by without smelling his brother. Paradis says that Joseph wanders by every day to dispose of the food that he cannot stand to eat, always in this vicinity.

Paradis and the narrator return to headquarters, where men play cards and gripe. Conversations and fragments of conversations intersperse with the sounds of gambling. Tirette and Paradis are in the middle of a story about training camp days when the call to arms sounds. The resulting chaos is described in sounds, movements, orders, counter-orders, and in lines of ordinary men, by no means fanatics, preparing for a sacrifice far greater than most people picture. They are not stereotypical heroes. The narrator notes specifically that evening brings rain, which seems to accompany every tragedy of World War I. Part of the chaos consists of Bertrand attaching kitchen knives to the buttons of select soldiers' greatcoat. Pépin asks for one but is told that those who volunteer are rejected. The significance of the knives and the selection process are not explained and Pépin is soon seen in the heat of battle. Bertrand leads the charge out of the trench.

Silence reigns until they cross the barbed wire, and then a curtain of "barrage fire" descends. His own hands being burnt by the falling, red-hot fragments, the narrator closely describes the poilus' fearful race forward to get away. When they reach theoretical safety, snipers begin picking off the officers. Finally, the long-feared machine guns open up at 50 yards. Survivors block out sound and plunge forward. People die at random. Those who reach the point where French artillery has destroyed the barbed wire feel a rush of pride. The narrator spends pages describing hand-to-hand combat with the token German defenders. When the fight ends, abruptly, the observes that no one is the person he had been shortly before. He describes an adrenalin high that only gradually allows thinking faculties to reengage. This is followed by more infinite waiting. Quiet Bertrand emerges briefly as a philosopher, talking about Wilhelm Liebknecht, a German pacifist at the time of the Franco-Prussian War, being right when he says that the Future must wipe out the shameful Present filled with soldiers and victims. Bertrand laughs at having once kidded about believing in prophecies and the narrator agrees. Such emphasis on Bertrand seems to portend his death.

When the narrator and Paradis are relieved, they find the communication trenches filled with newcomers from the 5th Battalion, come to attack the enemy. The 5th has throughout the novel been characterized as "lucky," avoiding fights. Heretofore not a stand-out character, Mathereau wonders how the Germans that will oppose the 5th feel, and is friends with huge Truc of the 5th, who brags about how he is off to seize the villas of German war heroes Paul von Hindenburg and Richard Glücks. The bravado comes through, even if the now-obscure references mean nothing. The scene grows confused as other conversations through thin walls are reported: a man talking about dead brothers who nonetheless looks forward to his five-year-old son some day being a fine poilu. Others are obviously contrasting Napoleon and Kaiser Wilhelm II, but only snippets come through. Later, debates about nationalism will develop these thoughts.

The scene changes as the narrator leads the wounded Joseph Mesnil to a Refuge on the Pylones Rd. They meet up with a shaken Volpatte shortly before coming upon Pépin's burial detail and learning the details of his death (a version of "friendly fire"). Reaching the precise spot from which they had launched their attack the night before, the narrator indulges himself in describing the hillside that they have descended. With all the searing detail of Dante he and Joseph pass through "an amazing charnel-house"

that burial details are only beginning to work on. Some bodies have lain there since May. The narrator pauses to recall the battle of Bethonval Wood, one of the most terrible in any war, where the French are cut down by machine guns right and left. Shattered bone fragments and rags now survive. From last night's encounter, German and French corpses putrefy together. The trio discovers Cocon's severed head, try to find something to say, but find nothing. There are too few survivors. The dead, by giving all of their strength, have a certain vague grandeur.

After a jarring aside on how the rats that consume the bodies are often found dead of poison under and around the corpses, Volpatte finds Bertrand's grotesque body. Always tranquil in life, he is stretched out like a cross and laughing. They arrange the body, take his papers, and summarize him as "a good sort" whom they truly need. His loss can easily be imagined by the reader. Joseph and the narrator continue their descent through "The Zouaves' Cells," shelters dug in May by these colorfully-dressed volunteers who are now skeletons. Reaching the International Trench, they find slaughtered Germans. Scattered religious tokens make the narrator think of the "Valley of Death" (Psalm 23), a second religious reference from a man who has earlier shown no interest in religion.

As they enter Trench 97, shrapnel bursts overhead and burrows into the hill. Joseph is overcome by futility and hatred that it always starts again. During a lull, the narrator half-carries sagging Joseph to "the last stage of his Gethsemane," another religious reference, which more properly would have been Calvary or Golgotha, the place of Jesus' crucifixion and death, rather than his place for praying beforehand for deliverance. Passing a wounded man who has become "a sort of screaming tree," the narrator recalls Poterloo's flaming death, which still affects him greatly. The chapter ends remembering Biquet writing to his mother from Gauchin-l'Abbé on a splendid afternoon, laughing that the rain, mud, and danger are past.. The survivors must go back to war, and for this they must be very strong.

Chapters 21-22

Chapters 21-22 Summary

Chapter 21, "The Refuge," continues the narrator and Joseph's trek, along trenches that parallel the treeless former Pylônes Rd., in sight of German observation posts. A hillock serves as the hub of a more complex trench system that reaches all parts of the sector. A doctor patches up patients and sends them either inside the Refuge or on to a bigger clearing station in the trench along Béthune Rd. Joseph waits two hours to be seen and then is lead away from the narrator, who rests in the two-level underground Refuge before walking back.

The feeling of suffocation is worse than in the trenches. At the bottom is a ill-lit cavern with a low ceiling. A burned German aviator and a zouave debate which has seen more. A man with gangrene complains of having been young and clean a mere week before. Another has just turned 26 but feels and looks like an old man. The German describes the battlefield from the air, where on Sunday both sides' religious services look identical. Flying lower, he hears a single chant, although each side prays against the other. What can God make of this? Some patients deny there is a caring God, but the German insists there is one God and wonders how he manages to bring all of these wounded together. Another voice talks of days without rations; another describes cholera. The German, determined to wrestle with the big picture, asks what God is thinking, letting everyone believe that he is on their side. A pain-racked voice claims not to believe in God because of all the innocent suffering. Another disbelieves after seeing men freeze to death. Everything must go before one can believe in God. This comes as a revelation to the mutilated who see the truth face-to-face. In the depths of the corridor, a hospital attendant re-wraps a bandage, warning the patient not to play with it again, and then disentangles two men, one a double amputee who is raving. In another corner, the wounded curse one another and have to be separated. Choking from the atmosphere, the narrator moves towards outside light. An hour-long shelling has collapsed a portion of the earthen roof, where a Red Cross sergeant removes intestines of men shattered by a shell. A prophet repeats, "What's the use in worrying?"

Farfadet appears, one eye missing and the other bandaged. Nearby two Foreign Legionaires talk, the one, sure that he is dying, offering his companion his identity papers so that he will be able to resume civilian life without a criminal record.. The narrator moves away discretely, only to hear other disquieting stories. As the narrator heads for the exit, the hospital sergeant, still disentangling body parts, is shot and dies quickly. The narrator meditates on the man's goodness, despite his "clerical impertinence," appreciating his sincerity and humane actions. Shells again rain down, destroying the roofing timbers. Everyone shouts in horror and scatters, defenselessly, looking far more horrible in the light of day. The German aviator demands that God reveal his true name. Another patient staggers with a wound resembling the Sacred Heart of Christ. The "What's the use in worrying?" man is green and silent. When the

bombardment ends, the narrator climbs out to see more wounded flowing in. It goes on for days.

In Chapter 22, "Going About," the survivors of Bertrand's Squad (Volpatte, Blaire, Paradis, Tirette, Marthereau, and the narrator) find themselves on an eight-day leave in Paris, their uniforms brushed and boots polished. They avoid the Grand-Café, which caters to officers, preferring to examine the sumptuous shops on the Place du Commerce. Volpatte admires the plump prostitutes, Paradis has eyes for rich pastries, and Blaire stops to look at clothing, having transformed into a well-groomed, elegant man. They shrug at a display window showing a German kneeling before his French captors. When a crowd gathers to learn about life at the front, they lie, saying that it is pretty much like the display.

They enter the ornate Café de l'Industrie et des Fleurs and order drinks. As civilians admire their Croix de Guerre medals, the men feel important but underplay the horrors that they have endured. A lady paints a romantic word picture of a charge; a gentleman regrets that his office cannot afford to lose him to the Army. Café regulars come and go, recognizing one another and chatting. Civilians call the poilus brave but justify their own safe jobs. The squad members steal away, furtively, irritated that they have not done their duty to set these "filthy idiots" straight. They vow to do better the next time—but Volpatte reminds them that they may be dead in eight days. The poilus are further annoyed to see the shirkers in military uniforms leaving work and being greeted by wives and children. The squad wanders in the twilight as the lights come on. They see the great Difference between those in society who sacrifice and those who enjoy. Volpatte vocalizes it: there are two Frances, sharply divided, and there are too many of them, the happy. They agree: in eight days they may be dead.

Chapters 21-22 Analysis

Chapter 21, "The Refuge," extends the horror of "Under Fire," as the narrator delivers Joseph to the central Refuge, a forward aid station, for their sector. The dominating mood is claustrophobia. After two hours, Joseph is patched up and led away, and the narrator enters the underground building to rest before returning to the squad. Having described the battlefield and the business of clearing corpses, he now observes the aftermath of war on living victims. The chapter includes a broad view of misery, but also highlights a select few.

A burned German aviator is the most vocal, and develops the religious theme that has been emerging. The saying that there are no atheists in foxholes becomes popular only in World War II, but the sentiment exists in the previous war. There have been few references thus far to displays of sincere piety or feigned religiosity, but the German demands an answer. He begins by describing an overflight of the battlefield, where on Sunday swarming masses emerge on both sides of the line to pray against each other rather than shoot. The religious services look identical and when he swoops down to hear them, their chants sound alike.

The aviator asks simplistically, what can God make of this? This inaugurates a debate. Some deny that there is a caring God. Days spent without rations, cholera, freezing to death, and innocent suffering argue against such a being. The consensus is that all evil manifestations must go before one can believe in God. The question becomes pointed when a Red Cross sergeant, the Marist Brother mentioned earlier, is killed by a sniper's bullet while removing the intestines of men shattered by an earlier shell. Hard on top of this tragedy—the life of a good man being snuffed out while doing good—an intense shelling begins, which destroys the Refuge. The so-called prophet, who has been repeating, "What's the use in worrying?" turns green and goes silent.

Balanced against this is a discussion between two wounded Foreign Legionnaires who have waited two days to be evacuated to the hospital for surgery. One is sure that he will die of his stomach wound, but hopes his comrade's foot can be repaired or replaced. Pointing out Dominique's life of evil, which would doubtless continue after the war, the dying man, Leonard Carlotti, offers to exchange identities with him. He has a common-law wife, Louise, in Longueville, Tunis, but no criminal record. Amazed, Dominique gratefully accepts.

Chapter 22, "Going About," shifts dramatically, to the peaceful streets of Paris, as Volpatte, Blaire, Paradis, Tirette, Marthereau, and the narrator enjoy an eight-day leave, their uniforms brushed and boots polished. In the ornate Café de l'Industrie et des Fleurs, over currant-vermouths, they feel important, having their Croix de Guerre medals admired. A lady paints a romantic word picture of a charge, which the squad members do not bother to dispute. A gentleman regrets that his office cannot afford to lose him to the Army. The true poilus leave, irritated that they have not done their duty to set these "filthy idiots" straight, and vow to do better the next time—but Volpatte twice reminds them that they may be dead in eight days. On the street, their old indignation at shirkers in military uniforms leaving their safe offices, is rekindled. Volpatte vocalizes the great Difference that exists between those who sacrifice and those who enjoy. There are two Frances, sharply divided, and there are far too many of the happy. Recall his rants on the subject after returning from the hospital. The poilus ominously agree: in eight days they may be dead.

Chapters 23-24

Chapters 23-24 Summary

Chapter 23, "The Fatigue-Party," shows the squad at dusk, picking up their digging tools and slugging through heavy rain to the Covered Trench, which vibrates to the engine of a searchlight. The wind is freezing at midnight, six hours after they begin their march. In Paris, it is theater time for the "rich and splendid." Their guide, a lieutenant, leads them wrong four times before finding the New Trench. No one knows where the front line is. It is 2 a.m., and by 6:00 they must pull out. Individuals line up to dig holes five feet long, 2.5 wide, and 2.75 deep, 15 feet per three-man team. Talk is forbidden and when men disobey, the Germans fire star shells followed by bullets. Survivors keep low as they continue digging. The ground gets softer as they hit water, creating a swamp. Men sleep while waiting for new orders.

The bombardment resumes, landing close. Men wedge into the hole that they have dug and shelter themselves with their shovels against the hideous death of barrage fire. The rain intensifies as the bombardment lessens. The narrator wanders with a group through morasses, seeking an entrance to the "trench of salvation." Finding it, they are warned away by men climbing out to avoid being drowned. The group moves towards voices until they realize that they are German. They reverse course, fighting the temptation to give in and die or be taken prisoner.

Chapter 24, "The Dawn," opens with the men sunk in the mire, awaiting their fate. The battlefield is a silent, universal flood. Paradis has survived. He and the narrator examine motionless lumps, drowned men in various poses, the front lines of both armies. Covered in mud, French and Germans cannot be told apart. Here, the war has ended. Hell is not fire but water. A few more survivors emerge, exhausted, bewildered, lamentable. Paradis and the narrator fall down, exhausted, and sleep. Four Germans approach, believing that they are dead but, seeing them move, ask to surrender. They have had enough. When one dies, the others weep. More men gather and they sleep jumbled together.

Awakening, Paradis exclaims, "That's war," meaning that war consists more of "frightful and unnatural weariness" than of reviews and hand-to-hand fights. It is "an endless monotony of misery" broken by tragedies. When Paradis recalls a beautiful woman whom they have met recently, another soldier rejects the idea of beauty. Paradis argues for viewing the war in its largest context, where individuals amount to nothing. The survivors discuss how no one will believe the story of this night, and they themselves will forget all but the names. Another man says that on leave he has forgotten almost everything and that rereading old letters is like opening a book anew. Humans are "forgetting-machines." Another feels that if neither side remembers, all of the misery is wasted.

Others believe that if this war is remembered, there will be no more war. That would be a positive outcome. There must be no more war after this. The others snarl agreement. Humans are meant to procreate, not to be killing beasts. The survivors are shaken by a simple logic: they have not only the right to happiness, but the duty to pursue this ideal. Two armies fighting one another is like one great army committing suicide. Men who have lived like savages for two years are morally enraged. They groan at the evil that they have done. When one man insists that Germany must cease to exist, another denounces militarism everywhere. The spirit of war itself must be killed. People must fight for progress rather than country. Fighting for various fatherlands and opposing humanitarian ideas is madness. Humans are mad. The men lying in mud want to live for tomorrow. If they do not finish the job in this war, there will be new calamity in two or three years. A dying man laments leaving his wife and children, and hopes that they have peace. Another does not fear more suffering, provided it accomplishes something.

They resume: people are the stuff of war, but individuals are invisible and silent in the mass. Without the masses there could be no war, yet they have no say in it, being steered by masters. All peoples are the same. Without realizing that he is quoting a great line from a century earlier, one man tries to "open the gates of heaven," declares that the people ought to be everything. Fraternity is an obscure dream, Liberty is relative, but Equality is always the same. Every human must have an equal share in the social life. The will of the majority must be invincible and infallible. Quarrels must be settled by justice that serves the general advantage. As the men rally around "Equality!" the sky grows overcast. The discussion continues: Every nation brings 1,500 fresh bodies to the God of War, thanks to the decisions of a few ringleaders. Distant guns boom, the talkers give cynical summaries of why war persists, and one calls on his comrades to trust God.

The narrator addresses the countless warriors who have been denied justice by "the sword-wavers, the profiteers, and the intriguers," bankers and speculators who live in safety and peace, admiring the pageantry of war. They perpetuate the past, where injustice is legal, and dismiss attempts at progress as being nursery tales. The clergy offer the morphine of Paradise to avoid change. Lawyers, economists, and historians offer theories about national unity that nowhere exists in reality. Human intelligence is short-sighted, given to trivialities, and great things are not learned from books. Supposed peacemakers encourage nationalism. Patriotism is made to serve impractical Utopianism, which spreads like cancer and ends either in war or armed peace. National truths are of necessity twisted. Those who argue like children over who starts a war perpetuate "the world's huge wound." Unable to make peace, they find excuses for labeling others enemies. These leaders are the enemies of the masses as surely as the German soldiers lying alongside the French ones in the mud. They must be identified and watched.

One man kneeling in the mud declares that he does not want to be called a hero, because they have all been murderers, like hangmen. Slaughter is always ignoble, even when sometimes necessary. There is no "military virtue" in killing Germans—or in saving Frenchmen's lives. One soldier favors making it a crime to "exhibit the fine side of war," if such a thing existed. The first man resumes: people will praise the poilus in

order to praise themselves for what they have not done. Only non-combatants see glory in military feats and to do so obscure individuals' sacrifices. Those killed in wave attacks are forgotten nobodies. Someone says that such talk could get one "shot at dawn." The religion of warlords is as stupid as the other religion. The speaker looks at the puddle of blood that he has shed, supposedly to heal the world. As rain falls heavily over the "flayed and martyred fields," the men straighten themselves and see apparitions of new enemies multiplying and shutting out the stars. The survivors raise their fists like Cyrano de Bergerac and Don Quixote, but their eyes are opened to the "boundless simplicity of things." The dawn of hope gives them new courage and strength. They return to the war.

Chapters 23-24 Analysis

Chapter 23, "The Fatigue-Party," shows the squad beginning its work period at dusk, after wasting another day in nothingness. Their labor has been often been painted in broad strokes, but the details never provided. Fatigue parties have been shown forming for various ad hoc needs, including lugging food to the units. Bertrand's Squad picks up its digging tools and rifles and moves out. The narrator likens their path to various kinds of food: the ground outside the trench is chocolate cream, the floor of the trench is porridge, and rocky patches are buttered toast. While indulging in these images, he observes that jokes are becoming rare.

The narrator describes what they encounter: men from the 204th, pale and shrunken, headed for the rear; heavy motor and horse traffic; rows of corpses. Others in turn watch them pass. The earth and sky seem befouled by contact with humanity. They must halt to let those with higher priority—machine gunners and telephonists—pass, and restarting is hard for the weary. Finally they reach the Covered Trench, which has the smell of a swamped cave. When someone lights a lamp for relief, the sergeant orders it extinguished to avoid detection from the air and lashes out at someone smoking—although the area is lit and heated by a searchlight. The rain gets worse and walking harder. The wind is freezing at midnight, six hours after they begin their march. In Paris, the narrator muses, it is theater time for the "rich and splendid." In a while, their guide, a hapless lieutenant, realizes that they have taken a wrong turn, and wriggles through to lead the retreat. The men sulk and then curse when he takes them into a stinking latrine. Flashes of fire overhead keep them from climbing out. The bombardment grows more intense. Rockets from both sides unite for form a new constellation. Only on the fourth try does the officer get the squad to its destination and engineers instruct them in performing their long-accustomed task. They have only four hours before dawn. Noise alerts the Germans, who send up rockets and then hone in artillery. Men keep low while digging and dare not stop lest they freeze. When they hit water, creating a swamp, the men sleep while awaiting new orders.

The bombardment resumes, landing very close. The men wedge into the hole that they have dug and shelter themselves with their shovels. They are sure that they will die. No one can flee because those at the end refuse to budge in the face of barrage fire. Fire and water blend as men prepare for hideous deaths. When the men are finally able to

move, they find the trench that has brought them here has vanished. The rain intensifies and the bombardment, concentrated on where the have fled, lessens. The narrator wanders with a group through morasses, seeking an entrance to the "trench of salvation." Finding it, they are warned away by men climbing out to avoid being drowned in mud. The group disbands as men seek their own way. They move towards voices until they realize that they are German. They reverse course, fighting the temptation to give in and die or be taken prisoner.

Chapter 24, "The Dawn," opens with the men sunk in the mire, awaiting their fate. There is more water than they had suspected: lakes and canals, a universal flood. There are no sounds. The world seems paralyzed. Paradis has also survived. They are joined by a few more survivors. Frenchmen and Germans indistinguishable in the muck. Both sides have had enough and are ready to surrender to the enemy in order to survive.

When Paradis exclaims "That's war," meaning that it is "frightful and unnatural weariness" more than reviews and hand-to-hand fights, it starts a philosophical debate that touches on beauty, the blessings of forgetfulness, the need to remember and tell, lest their misery be wasted, and the need for there to be no more war. These pitiful men fulfill the prophecy of the seers in Chapter 1, seeing war as mass suicide. They debate militarism and nationalism, and the need to fight for progress rather than for fatherlands.

Common people are the stuff of war, but each individual is invisible and silent within the mass. Still, the "new wilderness" is their doing. They agree that among the ideals of the French Revolution, Equality is supreme. As guns resume booming in the distance, the talkers give cynical summaries of why war persists, while one calls on them to trust God.

The narrator offers a soliloquy to the countless warriors who have been denied justice by "the sword-wavers, the profiteers, and the intriguers," bankers and speculators living in safety and peace, admiring the pageantry of war, perpetuating the past where injustice is legal, and reducing attempts at progress to the level of nursery tales. The clergy offer the morphine of Paradise to avoid change. Lawyers, economists, and historians offer theory about national unity when all nations are inhabited by diverse races. Human intelligence is short-sighted, given to trivialities. Great things are not learned from books. Supposed peacemakers encourage nationalism. Patriotism, which like family and local pride is naturally sacred, is made to serve impractical Utopianism, which spreads like cancer. It ends either in war or armed peace. National truths are, naturally, twisted. Those who argue like children over who starts war perpetuate "the world's huge wound." Unable to make peace, they find excuses for labeling others enemies. The people are the enemies of the masses, as surely as the German soldiers lying alongside the French soldiers in the mud. These people must be identified and watched.

One man kneeling in the mud declares that he does not want to be called a hero, because the poilus have been persistent murderers, like hangmen. Slaughter is always ignoble, even when necessary. There is no "military virtue" in killing Germans. Another denies loudly that he is heroic for saving the lives of Frenchmen. They might just as well

set fire to houses. One soldier favors making it a crime to "exhibit the fine side of war," if such a thing existed (that the press has been doing this all along has several times been mentioned in the novel). The first man continues, complaining that people will praise them in order to praise themselves also for what they have not done. Only non-soldiers see glory in military feats and only by obscuring individuals' sacrifices. Those killed in waves of attacks are forgotten nobodies. Someone says that that could get one "shot at dawn." The religion of war is as stupid as the other religion. The man who speaks looks at the puddle of blood that he has shed supposedly to heal the world.

As rain falls heavily over the "flayed and martyred fields," the men straighten themselves. They see apparitions of new enemies multiplying and shutting out the stars. The survivors raise their fists like Cyrano de Bergerac and Don Quixote, but their eyes are opened to the "boundless simplicity of things." The dawn of hope gives them new courage and strength. They return to the war.

Characters

Cpl. Bertrand

The aloof commander of a reserve squad in the second line, Bertrand is erect and silent, with a strong, handsome face and forthright gaze. Few details are offered about him other than that he has a famous knife with a horn handle and is a former factory foreman. He hates drunkenness, considering it a fatal poison, and his squad behaves soberly when others drink before moving to the front. Notable nearly every one of his men has won the Croix de Guerre for heroism. They are on call at night to build emergency earthworks at the front, but during the day have nothing to do. Bertrand reminds them they need only know that the "Boches "(Germans) are dug in ahead and must be put out soon. Duty and danger are equivalent when defending justice and liberty. It ought to be the common duty of all. When his men complain about able-bodied men performing safe support services in the rear, Bertrand declares that these necessary jobs should be performed only by the truly weak and old.

In the bloody battle for Hill 119 and Trench 97, Bertrand leads his men over the top and is seen kicking a German hand grenade back into the trench from which it is thrown. He is caught up in battle spirit. Next day, Volpatte and the narrator find his body grotesquely sprawled out, dead. Always tranquil in life, he is stretched out like a cross and laughing. They arrange the body, take his papers, and summarize him as "a good sort" whom they truly need. Earlier, the narrator had listened to Bertrand joins in a conversation about how no one will believe what they have just been through. Bertrand declares that it has been necessary for the future. He adds that only Wilhelm Liebknecht (a German pacifist at the time of the Franco-Prussian War) has gotten it right—the Future must wipe out the shameful Present with its soldiers and victims. Bertrand laughs at having once kidded about believing in prophecies. The narrator says softly that he believes likewise and is ordered to go to his post.

Firmin Volpatte

Square-faced with yellow-brown skin patched with black, a broken nose, reddened Asian eyes, a small, course mustache, and "Mongolian cheekbones," Volpatte has a hoarse, drawling voice. A native of the Côte d'Or ,Volpatte still wears the gaiters he is issued at mobilization and a balaclava (ski mask) and fleeces so bulky that he looks like a "walking tree-trunk." Volpatte coughs all day and is sure that he is "kicking the bucket." Having killed 30 Germans, he is sure that his "number's up."

Volpatte is involved in many of the incidents in the novel, including when a group stumble into the International Trench in search of matches, at Pépin's burial detail, and stumblling upon Cpl. Bertrand's grotesquely sprawled body out. The major event in his military career is being wounded and treated in the rear. What he sees there becomes an obsession.

With Fuillade, Volpatte is taken by the 5th Battalion from the front line and mysteriously disappears. Found by Farfadet and the narrator in the forest days later, Volpatte is obsessed with what time it is. His head bandaged and he is bleeding and trembling, both of his ears having been destroyed by simultaneous shell bursts on both sides of his head. He has been re-bandaged three times in the field and is sullen with thirst. He insists on carrying his own gear, but is certain that his wound will get him out of the war. He foresees the luxurious life of a rear-line hospital and getting to see his busty, mellow-featured wife and two little boys, the elder slender and the younger round, whose photograph he often shows to buddies. Despite this devotion, on seeing beautiful Eudoxie in the woods, Volpatte would happily pursue her, but is warned that she is dangerous.

With ears "stuck on again," Volpatte rejoins the squad two months later, livid and speechless over the hospital experience. Long knowing the danger of letting Volpatte hold in anger until he bursts, the friends coax out his story. At first Volpatte can only repeat, "There are too many of them," but later begins to provide detail. He hates the "duds galore," representing swarms of services, all spruced up, enjoying the high life, but claiming to have "been in the war." Volpatte insists that he is neither crazy nor unfair. He would trade places with them, but he has already faced danger. At any rate: there are too many of them. He tells of receiving a tour of the depot from a "reptile" in the Expenses Department who would never see the front, despite efforts by his superiors to move him there. The reptile skillfully uses every excuse and worms into everyone's affections. Every depot is filled with such characters, determined not to go to the front.

On leave in Paris with Blaire, Paradis, Tirette, Marthereau, and the narrator, Volpatte twice reminds them that they may be dead in eight days. His old indignation at shirkers in military uniforms leaving their safe offices is rekindled, and Volpatte vocalizes the great Difference between those who sacrifice and those who enjoy. There are two Frances, sharply divided, and there are far too many of the happy. One would have to turn the four great rivers of France into the teeming rear-echelon depots to cleanse them. Meanwhile, people live there peacefully and happily, while the poilus keep vigil in misery.

Lamuse

A huge "ruined tower" of a man, covered with tattered posters, Lamuse scratches all day like a gorilla. A fat peasant from Poitou who speaks in the same suburban accent as Barque, Lamuse has moist eyes and wine-colored cheeks, and a tomato-like mouth. He functions in Bertrand's Squad as a peacemaker, but is also one of the old timers who remembers looting Soisson and delights to tell of it. Lamuse admits to trying to avoid the trenches in the past but now stands ready to help his pals in danger anywhere. Although a loafer, he has been wounded and has saved lives. As they watch an airplane fly over, Lamuse predicts that they will never be practical, an attitude that the narrator considers obstinate, ignorant, and stubborn, but says nothing. A person who "knows what things are," Lamuse handles negotiations with an angry woman in Gauchin-l'Abbé, obtaining

for the squad sleeping space in her washing hut for 20 sous per week and a liter of wine for 22 sous. He assures the woman that he will not report the wine to the authorities.

Lamuse is one of the squad members who falls for beautiful Eudoxie Dumail. He follows her into the woods, looking like a wild boar, sticking his red snout through the bushes, but breaks off the hunt when he finds Volpatte, Fuillade, Farfadet, and the narrator returning to camp and insists on carrying their gear, becoming a "moving heap." Later, he announces that Eudoxie is following him and he intends to marry her. He overflows with sentiment, talking about the strain of restraining himself. He cannot find words to express his ardor. When they meet, however, she tells him that he disgusts her, but he pulls her close, trying to kiss her. She fights him off and stalks away, leaving him like poor Cyclops in the ancient legends, "a huge toy, a thing of derision." Afterward, he grows depressed and stops speaking, and volunteers for dangerous duty, digging holes for mines. He returns to the trench frantic, claiming to have had Eudoxie's molding corpse fall on him while he is digging. He hugs her as he had always wanted before laying her aside.

Lamuse dies alongside Eudore , Barque, and Biquet while on patrol with Bertrand, André Mesnil, and the narrator, searching for a new German listening post. Sappers recover the bullet-ridden bodies and pile them like tree trunks in the trench.

Poterloo

Wearing nearly new boots taken from a Bavarian machine-gunner, Poterloo is a former coal miner in the Calonne pit. His eyebrows are straw-colored and his eyes flax-blue. He speaks in a northern sing-song. He comes from Souchez in the Nord-Pas-de-Calais region of France, just down the Béthune Rd. from the trenches in which the squad has been working for six months. He is anxious to see it again after its liberation, but the Germans continue bombarding it. The narrator accompanies Poterloo on his "pilgrimage of peril" through a thick, protective fog. Poterloo recognizes the remains of The Red Tavern, but otherwise, Souchez has disappeared completely. Poterloo is like a sleep-walker, despairing, picturing the lost happiness of his vanished home. The are the only living beings in an "unreal and miasmal place."

Heading back to camp, Poterloo talks about his wife, Clotilde, aged 26, and little daughter, who live with his relatives in Lens. He has seen her 20 days earlier, drafted to help lay wire along "The Toboggan." On a whim he impersonates a German, finds Coltilde smiling naturally at a German officer, "a great striped simpleton." Poterloo also recognizes Madeleine Vandaërt, whose husband, Poterloo's friend, has recently died at Marne. She too, though in mourning, is smiling. Poterloo flees, stumbling, furious at the obvious betrayal. Only with difficulty does he refrain from killing her, but he also understands her need to live well. He realizes that she would marry again if he dies in the war, but he intends to survive and be part of the postwar rebuilding, physical and emotional. The Germans will do the same. Poterloo's mood brightens as he philosophizes, describing notable eccentrics from prewar Souchez who will return to the old ways. Everything will be remade, better. Poterloo meditates on the revival.

Spring revives Poterloo's spirits. He is sure that the war will end in this beautiful season and life will return to normal. The narrator walks beside the smiling man in the ranks when terrible explosion shakes them and he sees Poterloo go suddenly stiff, with "a flame in the place of his head." It is an image that never leaves the narrator; he mentions it several times.

Papa Blaire

With little blinking eyes and a toothless mouth set in a dusty face, Papa Blaire is shriveled, filthy, stinking, and constantly itching from parasites. He recalls being otherwise as a civilian, a small farmer in La Brie. When his comrades tease him about his condition, he takes offense and reminds them that they all have changed. Blaire has children at home about whom he worries, but he is willing to do his duty. He spends his days placidly yawning and smoking the pipe that protrudes from a heavy, drooping white mustache. His forehead wrinkles after dinner as he gives into the prevailing ribald humor of the squad. He is making a ring for his wife, a chubby-faced woman whose photograph and letters he carries. He is a miser. In Gauchin-l'Abbé, Blaire takes pleasure in watching chickens enjoy the yard during their brief lives.

Blaire begins the story badly needs to find a dentist to have his remaining molars pulled, and when this is accomplished, he begins a complete transformation. At first his new ivory false teeth give him trouble eating and talking, but as he grows used to them the glistening teeth make him feel elegant. He cleans himself up and, when unable to wash, he grows depressed. By the time that the squad gets leave in Paris, he is a fashion plate, window shopping for clothes while others contemplate prostitutes and tasty food. Late in the novel, Blaire becomes a cook and dedicates himself to finding firewood under the most adverse conditions. In this, he emulates the legendary cook Martin César, as some soldiers emulate Napoleon.

Barque

With a bloodless face and a red, apostrophe-shaped goatee, wearing a bleached and mottled eiderdown quilt, a cotton cap with a "saucy red tassel," and surgical bandages wrapped around his legs to preserve his pants, Barque is clearly a resourceful man. Before the war is a porter and messenger in Paris, riding his tricycle like an acrobat through traffic. He speaks in a combination accent. As he smokes his pipe, Barque shows himself quite observant, talking about how the squad members do not resembling one another. He believes soldiers are but drops of blood in "a flood of men and things." Barque claims to have sworn off grousing as the war lags on, after earlier fighting all "shirkers," who fail to do their duty at the front. He now lives day-to-day and hour-to-hour as best he can. He is one of the old timers in Bertrand's Squad, who remembers the joys of looting Soisson. Barque dies with Lamuse, Biquet, and Eudore while while on patrol with Bertrand, André Mesnil, and the narrator, searching for a new German listening post. Sappers recover the bullet-ridden bodies and pile them like tree trunks in the trench.

Adolphe Bécuwe

A former coal miner in the Lille district in the North of France, Bécuwe has a "marraine," a woman with whom he corresponds and who sends him tobacco and note paper. They "meet" through classified ads.

Eugène Biquet

A gray-skinned little soldier with a jaw like a paving-stone and a "rough and rock-hard little head" that looks unfinished, Biquet hails from Brittany. He alone in Bertrand's Squad wears a regulation cap and is considered the "gosling of the Class 1913." In May, before the novel opens, Biquet kills four Germans. He acts as the "hall-porter" in the squad's portion of the trench, directing traffic. In Gauchin-l'Abbé Biquet receives a letter from his mother, who worries about him enduring the cold and mud. Enjoying beautiful weather, he laughs at this. When Biquet dies along with Lamuse, Barque, and Eudore while while on patrol with Bertrand, André Mesnil, and the narrator, searching for a new German listening post, the narrator removes his papers, including the answer to his mother from Gauchin, which is never posted.

Cadilhac

Wearing his undersized regulation helmet over a balaclava (ski mask), Cadilhac is a land owner in Auvergne. A recent draftee, he has not been in Bertrand's Squad as long as the others, giving them an opportunity to tell their stories.

A. Cajard

A poilu executed in Argoval as an example to others who seek to avoid the trenches, Cajard had served on the front since August of 1914. Two co-defendants are sentenced to life imprisonment because they do not have a minor criminal record (public drunkenness). His executioners feel bad about what they have had to do and carve protests into the post against which he dies. The narrator gives Cajard a pseudonym to protect his posthumous identity.

Leonard Carlotti and Dominique

Two soldiers of the French Foreign Legion whom the narrator observes in the Refuge awaiting medical evacuation, Carlotti expects to die from abdominal wounds but Dominique has only been shot in the leg and should survive. Carlotti offers to exchange identification papers with Dominique, who has a criminal record, to allow him to live freely after the war in Longueville, Tunis, where Carlotti has a common-law wife, Louise. Amazed, Dominique accepts.

Martin César

A legendary cook who has a talent for finding firewood amidst the shortage, César dies when a bomb hits his stove. He is given a proper funeral in a coffin made of flooring. Cpl. Bertrand comments that César would never forgive himself for not thinking of tearing up the floor for his fire. When Blaire becomes a cook, he emulates César.

Caron

Wounded and sent to the rear, Caron entrusts to Poterloo the boots he has taken from a Bavarian machine-gunner. He loves to tell how the corpse's legs snap off before the tight boots yield and they have to be dug out with help from Euterpe the cyclist.

Cocon

A desiccated person wearing glasses and a black smock, Cocon is a former statistician for an ironworks and in camp is the "Man of Figures," computing the time necessary for everything. He has the industry of an insect and delivers facts to anyone who will listen. He complains about the "arrangement and intricacy" of the trenches and lectures on their extent. At the train station after leaving Gauchin-l'Abbé, Cocon is in his glory, explaining to his comrades the organization of the French Army in the minutest detail. In the barn in Gauchin, Cocon is too weak from cold and wet to change his linen and is devoured by lice. He dies when a shell hits the shell hole in which he cowers. Volpatte finds his head and claims his helmet.

Eudoxie Dumail

A shapely young refuge, a "lissome and dainty gypsy," with a "strangely slight and pale face," magnificent, sparkling eyes, glistening white teeth, red lips, and fair hair, Eudoxie stays with a family at Gamblin, She is said by Fouillade to be "queer," in the sense of mentally unbalanced, wandering through "No Man's Land," watching people, and getting easily spooked. Several members of Bertrand's Squad become enamored of her. Lamuse follows her like prey into the forest, and the wounded, home-bound Volpatte finds her good enough to eat. The narrator later sees Eudoxie, smiling at Farfadet, before slipping into the dark foliage. Eudoxie follows the battalion to Gauchin-l'Abbé, where the narrator sees her in the shadows but Lamuse does not. Later, on a stroll, Lamuse reveals that he has seen her following him and intends to marry her. When Lamuse announces his feelings, Eudoxie declares that he disgusts her and fights off his attempts at kissing her. Later, when the squad returns to Gauchin, Lamuse claims to have had Eudoxie's molding corpse fall on him while he is digging with the sappers. He hugs her as he had always wanted to, before laying her aside. He assumes that she catches a stray German bullet during a solitary walk.

Eudore

Wearing a cuirass (breastplate armor) of moleskin turned inside out, Eudore looks like a beetle, and when scratching himself all day, he looks like a marmoset. He has the "air of a martyr." Pale and pleasant-faced, he formerly keeps a roadside café near the present front lines, and his wife, Mariette, lives in Villers-l'Abbaye and runs a café. They have not see one another in 15 months when Eudore gets leave. They agree to meet at his parents home in Mont-St-Eloi, but she fails to arrive. The parents are annoyed that Eudore seems bored with them. On the last day, he races to Villers, walking through driving rain. At the station he meets five "old cronies," who follow him home. Mariette waits with open arms.

The men cannot continue on to Vauvelles and a nearby farm cannot take them in, so they spend the night in Eudore's small house. They want to leave, to give the couple privacy, but neither will hear of it. In the morning, Mariette serves café customers and is gracious to the soldiers, who are sorry to have been in the way. Husband and wife get a half-minute kiss before he has to run. She gives him ham, bread, and wine for the road, which he shares with his friends. Eudore keeps his wife's letters and rereads them when he is "cold and humpy." Eudore dies along with Lamuse, Barque, and Biquet while on patrol with Bertrand, André Mesnil, and the narrator, searching for a new German listening post. Sappers recover the bullet-ridden bodies and pile them like tree trunks in the trench.

Farfadet

A frail, sensitive, sentimental municipal clerk, Farfadet keeps away from his filthy comrades and appears like "a foreigner or a convalescent." He has a shrill, almost feminine voice. When he and the narrator are assigned by Cpl. Bertrand to find the missing Volpatte and Fouillade, Farfadet comes to understand why soldiers hope for a "good wound," one that lets them live but gets them away from the front. In Gauchin-l'Abbé Farfadet is happy to be near Eudoxie Dumail, whom he believes desires a rendezvous with him, but is called to Brigade Headquarters in the rear as a typist, saved for a while. The men envy him. Farfadet never hears of Eudoxie's death when he returns to the squad, as Lamuse takes the news to his own grave. The narrator finds Farfadet in the wretched Refuge, one eye missing and the other bandaged, waiting patiently for treatment.

Fouillade

A 40-year old former boatman from Cette, Fouillade has wicked eyes and the long face of a musketeer with sunken, "funnel-shaped" cheeks and dark skin. He is "thin as an insect" with a "long Don Quixote carcase." With Volpatte, Fouillade is taken by the 5th Battalion from the front line and mysteriously disappears. Rescued unharmed by Farfadet and the narrator, Fouillade envies Volpatte's "luck" in losing both ears, which

will probably be his ticket home. Fouillade warns his comrades about the beautiful refugee Eudoxie Dumail, whom they encounter in the woods.

After the rescue, for which buddies think he will be "carpeted," Fouillade acts strangely, taking advantage of a pouring rain to take a shower-bath (they say that he has the "disease of cleanliness") and dreams of his beautiful native land, L'Hérault, on the Mediterranean. His concubine, Clémence, still lives there. Recalling how Magnac, keeper of a tavern in Béziers, invites him for a drink, Fouillade runs out in search of wine. Realizing that he has no money, he also realizes that none of his comrades will lend him any, as he is on the outs with or in debt to everyone. Fouillade befriends the mistreated dog, Labi, whose depression resembles his own. Fouillade's fate is left untold.

The German Aviator

Burned in the crash of his plane, the unnamed German Aviator talks in the Refuge, a way station for the wounded, about seeing from the sky both sides praying to the one God for victory over the other. He cannot understand how a good God could allow or cause war. His speech inspires a number of non-believers to open up.

Marchal

The narrator's old friend, Marchal loses most of his squad and narrates in grizzly detail their deaths.

Margoulin

A member of Bertrand's Squad who dies at le Crassier, Margoulin is a good sort who constantly talks about protesting conditions to the captain and commandant, but never says a thing.

Marthereau

Wearing filthy mismatched puttees, Marthereau smokes with "eyes front" all day. A short-legged rag merchant, wholesaler and warehouser, specializing in rabbit skins, before the war, Marthereau gets cut up climbing over a wall to visit a "jail-bird" of the 11th. Cpl. Bertrand calls him "Grandpa" and "Old Rubbish-heap," depending on his mood. A letter from Marthereau's wife about the value of their pig starts a fight between Pépin and Tulacque. Marthereau complains that all poilu are unlucky and too stupid.

André and Joseph Mesnil

Spending his days combing his fine, silky chestnut beard all day, André is formerly a chemist in Normandy who retains traces of his former distinction. Brother Joseph, formerly a bookseller in Lyon, drowses all day. André disappears during the fire fight in which Lamuse, Barque, and Biquet die, searching for a new German listening post. Joseph goes out alone into "No Man's Land" in a futile attempt to find his brother. Two other brothers have already been killed in Alsace, one in Champagne, and one in Argonne, and squad members fear that Joseph will step in front of a bullet to end his misery. No one tells him about spotting—and smelling—André within arm's reach of the French trench. In the great battle of Hill 119, Joseph charges a machine gun and is gravely wounded. The narrator is assigned to take him to a transport point for the rear. They come again under shelling, at which Joseph rants. Before leaving, he points out that the whole survivors will have to return to battle, and this will take real strength.

Palmyra

The woman in Gauchin-l'Abbé whose wash shack Bertrand's Squad rents for 20 sous a week, Palmyra has two children. She gradually softens her antagonistic attitude towards her clients. When they discover an aged "treasure-seeker" rummaging through the trash, Palmyra does not drive him away, thinking that everyone deserves to exploit "the national calamity."

Paradis

A plump, baby-faced soldier, Paradis is a former carter from Morvan, and one of the old timers in Bertrand's Squad who remembers looting Soisson. In Gauchin-l'Abbé, Paradis sees a bad omen in a hen that marches around the yard followed by her chicks and remembers bitterly how a quartermaster sergeant has cheated them. Paradis has sworn off women. Paradis alone survives the German bombardment and torrential rains that turn the trenches into swamps and drown men from both sides. Awakening, Paradis exclaims, "That's war," meaning that it is "frightful and unnatural weariness" more than reviews and hand-to-hand fights. It is "an endless monotony of misery" broken by tragedies. When Paradis recalls a beautiful woman whom they have met recently, another soldier rejects the idea of beauty in such horror. Tomorrow and in days to follow the fighting will begin again. Paradis argues for viewing the whole war, in which individuals amount for nothing. His fate is left undescribed.

Pépin

Wearing a square of linoleum on his back, Pépin is instantly recognizable at a distance. He is an Apache, formerly working as a butcher in the suburbs of Paris. He fascinates people by showing fawn gaiters taken from a corpse. Comrades consider him a dubious man, said to have married during his last sick leave in order to collect a separation

allowance. A letter from Marthereau's wife about the value of their pig starts a fight between Pépin and Tulacque, and both vow to resume it later. One of the old timers in Bertrand's Squad, Pépin fondly remembers looting Soisson. When the conversation turns to German officers, Pépin notes that they are a rich source of looting when killed or captured. He is determined to get a "silver hat" (a German helmet) as a souvenir. .He shows off silver objects stolen from an "ugly trollop" in Grand-Rozoy. Pépin volunteers for the suicidal attack on Hill 119, but is turned down. Nevertheless, he shows up at the end of the assault and is the first to enter a German "funk-hole." Later, without telling anyone, he enters a second to butcher the inhabitants, and dies when the French gas it.

Pépère and Plumet

Despised cooks who the men assume are drinking all of the wine rations and holding meals back, Pépère and Plumet do their best to avoid tensions, by not announcing menus beforehand, for instance. When, as part of Class '93, Pépère is sent to the rear, to join the Territorial Regiment. Everyone gossips about it.

Poupardin

With the "indistinct bulk" of a bear, Poupardin leads the foraging for a means of lighting a fire to cook a flank of horse that Bertrand's Squad has obtained. Poupardin wraps himself all over against the cold in a cape of goat- and sheepskin, which gives him an occult look.

The Red Cross Sergeant / Marist Brother

Working in the Refuge, a way station for the wounded, the unnamed Red Cross Sergeant, earlier mentioned as a Marist Brother, works to remove body parts from a bomb crater. While at work, the enormous bald, black-bearded man with the chest of a gorilla, is shot in the throat and, unable to communicate, dies swiftly. The narrator contemplates the death of this mild, good man, forgiving his exasperating sermons about France and the Virgin Mary, and appreciating his deeds of devotion. His heart had been true in this "corner of Hell."

Remure

After the great fire-fight, the narrator and badly-wounded Joseph Mesnil find Papa Remure bandaged and waiting for evacuation. Doubting that he will last until evening, Remure wants to make his life's confession to the narrator, telling how the war has turned him into a killer after having lived as an honest man. The narrator promises to return after getting Joseph to his destination, but during a renewed German bombardment sees that Remure has vanished.

Sgt. Sacerdote

A man stuck in a hole near Volpatte and Fouillade, Sacerdote suffers shell shock (now called Post-Traumatic Shock Syndrome—PTSS) and appreciates the two "slanging" him out of it a bit.

Tirette

Wearing gray civilian puttees, Tirette is proud to come from Clichy-la-Garenne. He is "something of a psychologist" whose "long experience of calamity" teaches him not to jump to conclusions.

Tirloir

With a pale head, pointed chin, protruding upper teeth, grimy wrinkles around his mouth, and wearing a greatcoat too large for him, Tirloir is usually angry and in a hurry. He is dubbed "The Grumbler" by his comrades, who consider him "daft and crazy." He formerly daubs carts with paint. If he had his way, Tirloir would make every soldier take turns cooking and send the shirking ex-cooks off to the trenches. One of the old timers in Bertrand's Sqad, Tirloir remembers looting Soisson. He dislikes talk about the "dirty Boche race," believing that all men are pretty much the same. German officers, however, he considers true monsters, having seen a Prussian colonel up close, even as a prisoner looking down on everyone. Tirloir claims to have kicked the man in the rump and nearly made him strangle with rage. When hoods are banned, Tirloir refuses to discard his until the general also bans rain. He writes letters constantly. His wife sends him a tiny whistle to blow if wounded, in order for his comrades to save his life. In the end, Tirloir is sent to the rear, suffering dysentery before the battles that claim most of his comrades' lives.

Adolphe Tulacque

A magnificent man who has fashioned a lemon-yellow oilskin sleeping bag into a coat, Tulacque has a forceful face, with squinting eyes, one pale, one greenish. He is regarded as Bertrand's Squad's "Big Chief." An early distinction is when he discovers a prehistoric ax. Tulacque formerly tends bar at the Throne Tavern in the suburbs of Paris. A letter from Marthereau's wife about the value of their pig starts a fight between Pépin and Tulacque, both of whom vow to resume the fight later. Tulacque boasts of killing nine Germans while taking a trench; he aims at the officers. Tulacque has an ancient grudge against the police, so he heartily disagrees when Volpatte allows that there are a few good ones in his country. Tulacque is sent to the rear, suffering pneumonia and send the squad postcards from the hospital. Thus he avoids the battles that claim most of his comrades' lives.

Sgt. Vigile

A "nice little boy" with the beginnings of a mustache, Vigile plays games with children when at headquarters. He occasionally comes to Cpl. Bertrand's squad. Vigile is killed when a shell hits him in the head, flattening it like a pancake and spreading it on the ground.

Objects/Places

Poilu

As translator W. Fitzwater Wray notes, poilu is "The popular and international name for a French soldier. Its literal meaning is 'hairy, shaggy,' but the word has conveyed for over a century the idea of the virility of a Samson, whose strength lay in his locks." The chief characters in the novel, beginning in Chapter 2, are poilu, drawn from all backgrounds and types: grumblers, dogged, brave under fire (most in the squad have won the Croix de Guerre) but disobedient on trivial matters of military appearance. Cpl. Bertrand's Squad, belonging to the 6th Battalion, 18th Company, is depicted as "worn-out and trench-foul," sinister troglodytes (cavemen). They are typical, good, simple men torn from the joys of life, ignorant, narrow-minded, common-sensical, long-suffering, instinctive, hoping to survive and again enjoy life. The poilu resent "shirkers," both civilian and in uniform, assigned to safe rear-guard areas.

Ablain-Saint-Nazaire

A long village in the Pas du Calaisin region of Northern France, Ablain lies in ruins and is mostly deserted. The tall poplars along the road are mangled, and the road itself turns into a marsh. At a nearby hillock, the squad sees "the lively movement of human beings" and advances cautiously. Soon, Bertrand's Squad is caught up in the suicidal fight for Hill 119 and Trench 97.

Argoval

A village in which Bertrand's Squad stops, Argoval is where A. Cajard of the 204th is executed for trying to avoid going back to the trenches. Sgt. Suilhard leads the narrator down a pretty, tree-lined lane to the field where the "descent sort" of man, if a bit "funky," is shot. Members of the firing squad describe the "whole ceremonial" and carve an inscription to him. The narrator gives both village and victim pseudonyms to protect their identity.

Engagés

French soldiers who volunteer in peacetime to serve 3-5 years, and in exchange are given the right to chose their arm of service, with some qualifications, Engagés are consider by some members of Bertrand's Squad as integral parts of the war effort, deserving of honor, but by others as part of the vast network of "shirkers."

Gauchin-l'Abbé

The village in the Pas du Calais in which the exhausted regiment seeks sanctuary, Gauchin-l'Abbé is Brigade Headquarters and site of the court-martial. Gauchin is said to have shops of every kind and seems a Promised Land to the troops. It is laid out in a great Y, forking at the "mairie" (Mayor's residence). Officers take residence in private homes while the poilus find space in barns and other inhospitable locations. The quartermasters cause much confusion. Thanks to Lamuse's unexpectedly skillful and forceful negotiations with an angry woman, Palmyra, the squad rents sleeping space in her washing hut for 20 sous per week and a liter of wine for 22 sous. He assures the woman that he will not report the black market wine to the authorities. Later, Lamuse's one-sided courtship of beautiful Eudoxie Dumail ends in Gauchin, leaving him despondent.

Grand-Rozoy

One of the places that Bertrand's Squad is quartered before the novel opens, Grand-Rozoy is recalled by Pépin, thanks to some silver objects that he steals there from an "ugly trollop." She doubtless is still searching for them.

L'Hérault

The region in the South of France, on the Mediterranean, L'Hérault (also referred to as the Midi) is a great producer of wine. Fouillade dreams vividly of his native land, while freezing in a dilapidated northern barn. He recalls the village of Cette, built on the Canal du Midi, the sounds, the scents of thyme and immortelles, nearby Mont St.-Clair, and the glassy green basins of Lake of Thau. In the distance stand the Pyrenees. Fouillade grows up happily there and later lives with his concubine, Clémence. He wonders if he will ever return. Recalling how Magnac, keeper of a tavern in Béziers, invites him for a drink, Fouillade in the present time runs out in search of wine.

Hill 119 and Trench 97

The section of battlefield where Lamuse, Eudore , Barque, and Biquet die while on patrol with Bertrand, André Mesnil, and the narrator, while searching for a new German listening post, Hill 119 overlooks a deep ravine. The narrator is among those assigned by Cpl. Bertrand to advance on the enemy. Near Trench 97, which the Germans have abandoned, they run into "barrage fire," a curtain of shrapnel the covers the battlefield. They race to the nearby International Trench and face machine gun fire. The French massacre the Germans after the latter use a "white flag" ploy.

International Trench

An odd feature of "No Man's Land" running behind the actual fronts, the International Trench has French and German sections that are not marked in any way. It meanders and is partially collapsed. A group of Bertrand's Squad, in search of matches, stumbles into the International Trench, hides from a lone German sentry, kills him, steals his possessions (including matches), and races back. Stopped at the entry to the French trench system, they learn where they have been. During the slaughter on Hill 119, French survivors flee into the largely-collapsed International Trench, which is filled with dead Germans.

Moroccan Division

Members of the French Colonial Forces, the Moroccan Division is pictured heading to the front to take part in an offensive operation. The poilus of Cpl. Bertrand's squad, having mocked the aged and decrepit Territorial Army sent to augment their own second-line efforts, show respect to the disquieting, taciturn Moroccans, renowned for ferocity, particularly with the bayonet, and "predilection for 'no quarter.'"

The New Trench

After the bloody battle for Hill 119, Bertrand's Squad is sent out to dig new fortifications. A lieutenant gets them hopelessly lost in a driving rain, before delivering them to spot in which they are told to dig until dawn. No one is sure which side of the German lines they are on. Forbidden conversation alerts the Germans, who launch flairs and then open fire. The driving rain and shallow water table, however, prove more deadly, flooding and collapsing existing trenches and the new one. Paradis and the narrator alone survive from the squad, and join a handful of other survivors who discuss the war philosophically.

Paris

The capital of France, Paris is depicted as the survivors of Bertrand's Squad enjoy an eight-day leave, sightseeing along the Boulevard de la République, Avenue Gambetta, and the Place du Commerce. They find the city impressive, in touch with normal life and look forward to getting used to it again. They find themselves praised as heroes but downplay the truth. Seeing men in military uniforms who work in ministries by day and enjoy their families by night, Volpatte in particular realizes that there are two, very different Frances. The men also realize that in eight days they may be dead.

The Refuge

A first aid station located at the hub of a complex trench system that reaches all parts of the sector, the Refuge is a claustrophobic two-level subterranean area for the wounded to rest after seeing doctors and while awaiting evacuation to a bigger clearing station in the trench along the Béthune Rd. The narrator brings badly-wounded Joseph Mesnil there and observes the horrors while resting up for the walk back to the squad. A German bombardment collapses much of the roof structure before he manages to leave.

The Sanatorium

Located in the shadow of Mont Blanc, the Dents du Midi, and the Aiguille Verte, in the Alps, where France, Italy, and Switzerland meet, the Sanatorium accommodates the novel's opening scene. Located in a "palatial hospital," it houses an international population of intellectual invalids, who learning of the outbreak of World War I, decry the 30 million soldiers who are bound to die and hope for a better future. It is said to be "isolated in Space and overlooks the world." The rest of the novel shows this prophecy coming to pass and the final chapter shows the victims hoping for an end to war and nationalism forever.

Soissons

A city in Northern France, Soisson brings back memories to the veterans of Bertrand's Squad of pleasant months spent there while the population has fled. They and other poilus loot food, drink, and above all firewood—including a violin, billiard cues, and canes. Officers also take part, particularly Lt. Virvin and Saladin, the transport officer.

Souchez

A town in the Nord-Pas-de-Calais region of France, just down the Béthune Rd. from the trenches in which the squad has been working for six months, Souchez is home to Poterloo, who is anxious to see it again, but the Germans, after withdrawing, continue bombarding it flat and unrecognizable. The squad passes through again on the eve of the great battle for Hill 119.

Territorial Army

The French Volunteer Army consists of trained reservists who can be called up in an emergency, the Territorials are mocked by Bertrand's Squad when they march in to fortify the second line and help maintain the communication trenches. Most are "stunted and elderly," dusty, "broken-winded," wearing patched-up greatcoats. Tirette and Barque, the squad's "twin wags," make fun of them.

Trenches

Trenches are the most characteristic feature of the Western Front during World War I. They are dug in parallel, ranging back from the fighting front. In the French sector there are 15 lines, some abandoned, some maintained and "bristling with men." The parallels are joined by"galleries" like ancient streets. The French Army alone has 10,000 km. (62,250 miles) of trenches, which the Germans match, and "the French front is only about one-eighth of the whole war-front of the world." Cpl. Bertrand's squad is in the second parallel, facing danger only when called on to build emergency earthworks at the front. This hazardous work is mentioned regularly throughout the novel, but is depicted at its worst only in the final chapters, where nature washes out all that men have dug and kills more than do bullets and shells.

Villers-l'Abbaye

The tiny hamlet in which Eudore's wife, Mariette, lives for 15 months while he is in the army, running a café, Villers is badly damaged by artillery. Eudore is able to spend only one night with Mariette, who is unable to reach his parents home in Mont-St-Eloi, where he spends the bulk of his leave. On the last day, he races to Villers through driving rain. "Old cronies" whom he meets at the station cannot be put up at a nearby farm because it has been turned into a makeshift POW camp.

Zouaves

French volunteer troops who retain the colorful costumes first adopted in colonial Algeria, the Zouaves fall in May of 1916 in great numbers at Hill 119, mowed down by machine guns. The narrator and Joseph Mesnil wander through "The Zouaves' Cells," the single-man holes dug by the Zouaves, whose remains have yet to be buried.

Themes

Power

Power is the overwhelming reality in Henri Barbusse's Under Fire: The Story of a Squad. Written in 1917, two years after the events it portrays, the novel shows the awesome physical power of World War I weaponry. While puny and primitive by 21st-century standards, they are real and terrifying to those facing them. Barbusse alludes to the Zouaves dropping their colorful uniforms to avoid being such ready targets for the machine guns. These new inventions along with " barrage fire," a hideous rain of fiery metal in sheets, are most feared and minutely described. Characters debate the future of aeronautics, whose terror they do not feel in brief overflights.

Power is also seen in its spiritual aspect as poilus (French infantrymen) endure impossible conditions with fortitude and resignation. They grouse, but they also obey. The physical horrors of the trench system on the Western Front is depicted in detail throughout, made worse by the inefficient command structure that frustrates the best of efforts. At one point, the squad of diggers stands aside to watch more elite corps pass by and endures disdainful looks.

In the end, it is the Power of Nature that conquers the combatants of both sides, as a deluge of rain and a rising water table combine to collapse "No Man's Land" and drown all but a handful of survivors. Rain falls incessantly throughout the novel and at one point Barbusse declares that it accompanies every major event in the terrible war. The survivors are so caked with mud as to hide signs of nationality. One character, Paradis, declares that war is "frightful and unnatural weariness" more than reviews and hand-to-hand fights. It is "an endless monotony of misery" broken by tragedies.

Justice

In the final chapter of Henri Barbusse's Under Fire: The Story of a Squad a handful of survivors of nature's wrath sit in mud, philosophically discussing World War I. In Chapter 1, a pristine international group of "invalids" had foreseen 30 million soldiers dying in the terrible conflagration just declared, and had hoped against hope that from the sacrifice, rank-and-file soldiers would demand and form a new world of justice. The German and Austrian seers had condemned their nations' aggression. In the sucking mud, the surviving poilus (French infantrymen) disagree about guilt. Some see the necessity of destroying Germany before justice and peace can reign. Others see inhumanity as a universal trait, poisoned all the more by rampant nationalism and exploitation by leaders who have self-interests to defend: politicians, generals, businessmen, and the clergy.

The survivors see (as had the invalids) that World War I continues the French Revolution, which had called for "Equality, Fraternity, Liberty." They rally around the idea that the peoples of the world must all agree that Equality is of supreme importance and

is the inalienable right of all. Fraternity is an obscure dream, while Liberty is relative. The will of the majority must be invincible and infallible. Quarrels must be settled by justice that serves the general advantage, unlike warfare, where a few gilded ringleaders blithely sacrifice 1,500 fresh bodies regularly to the God of War.

Justice—or rather, the other side of the coin: injustice—is shown throughout the novel on a more practical scale in the hordes of "shirkers" who live life grandly in the rear areas (including Paris), eating, drinking, and making merry," and doing everything possible to avoid coming close to the front. The poilus universally detest them, although some who have fought and suffered would not mind being sent to the rear. In one vignette, a veteran of the trenches is executed when he tries not to return. His accomplices receive life in prison, not having a minor criminal blot on their record. The Army must have examples to keep order.

Religion

The saying that there are no atheists in foxholes becomes popular only in World War II, and Henri Barbusse's Under Fire: The Story of a Squad includes few references to either sincere piety or feigned religiosity until it the squad truly enters the "Valley of Death" (a jarring reference to Psalm 23). In the International Trench, they find among the slaughtered Germans pamphlets and religious tokens. The narrator remarks on battlefield victims who in death appear like crucifixes and one who resembles the Sacred Heart of Jesus. At one point, he evokes Moses' pillars of cloud and pillars of fire in the desert of Sinai (Exodus 13), which in France men dive underground to avoid. The narrator never describes men crossing themselves or crying out to God as they are struck down. He has at most some Christian book-learning.

The question of theodicy—why an all-powerful God would not prevent or eliminate evil and suffering—is taken up at length when the narrator accompanies a buddy to a medical station. There, a burned German aviator describes overflying the battlefield on Sunday, and being surprised to see the swarming masses that emerge on both sides of the line not shooting, but praying against each other. The religious services look identical and when he swoops down to hear them, their chants sound alike. The aviator asks simplistically, what can God make of this? This inaugurates a debate.

Some deny that there is a caring God. Days spent without rations, cholera, freezing to death, and innocent suffering argue against such a being. The consensus is that all manifestations of evil must end before one can believe in God. The question becomes pointed when a Red Cross sergeant, a Marist Brother who occasionally annoys people by preaching about France and the Virgin Mary but otherwise does good in hospital work, is killed by a sniper's bullet while removing the intestines of men shattered by an earlier shell. Hit in the throat, he cannot utter any final words of contrition. Hard on top of this tragedy—the life of a good man being snuffed out in the act of doing good—an intense shelling begins, which destroys the Refuge.

Finally, at the end of the novel, a handful of survivors discuss how every nation regularly brings 1,500 fresh bodies to the God of War, thanks to the decisions of a few gilded ringleaders. The clergy are among those who protect their vested interests against change, offering believers the "morphine of Paradise." Most of the survivors are cynical about why war persists, while only one calls on them to trust God. Most see the "religion of war" being as stupid as that "other religion," Christianity. A man looks down at the puddle of blood that he has shed—supposedly to heal the world.

Style

Point of View

In Under Fire: The Story of a Squad (Le Feu), Henri Barbusse speaks in the first person past tense. In the early chapters, introducing his mass of characters and setting the stage for the action of the battlefield, he stands back and only gradually becomes an active participant. This occurs when a buddy asks why he is always jotting notes. He admits that he plans to write a book about their experiences. He intends to include their own words and also "big words" that tell the truth about the war. Barbusse writes as a participant, not allowing himself to slip into omniscience. Note that he dedicates the novel "to the memory of the comrades who fell by my side at Crouÿ and on Hill 119, January, May, and September, 1915." Whether he incorporates actual comrades into the novel and/or creates fictional characters on his own is immaterial, for his object is to show that war, while waged by the masses, is oblivious to individuals and out of the control of those who suffer in the trenches. The book is published in 1917 and the graphic descriptions demonstrate that the impressions are fresh.

Throughout the novel, the narrator records conversations among the poilus, civilians, and even a captured German aviator, which adds to the diversity of points of view. The most-debated topic is whether those who serve in uniform but in complete safety in the back areas (and even Paris) are worthy to be considered soldiers. Contributors generally feel that some risk at some point must be involved to rate the honor, but also agree that having faced death they would happily accept safe assignments. Volpatte insists at full voice that there are too many hiding in the rear; others are less shrill. All agree that someone has to perform those services.

Although the narrator is clearly not religious, he does not appear to be like Barbusse himself an atheist. He depicts little religiosity among the troops (what little is confined to the Germans) but religious themes suddenly crop up when the fighting intensifies. The German aviator, who describes what the French and German congregations look like, each asking God to grant them victory, turns into a wider discussion of theodicy—why an omnipotent being allows suffering and evil. Nameless wounded men throw in various opinions. The theme of evil reappears at the end of the novel, rather secularized, as the few survivors debate the future: will this war end wars or will those elements of every society that have vested interests in waging war prevail and continue sending victims to the front? Caked in mud, the men philosophize about nationalism, patriotism, the virtues of the French Revolution (Equality, Fraternity, and Liberty), and other concepts raised in Chapter 1 by pristine pundits meditating on the first day of the war about what lies ahead. The opening chapter, of necessity told in the third person, foresees everything and hopes that the surviving warriors will force a new and better future.

Setting

Under Fire: The Story of a Squad (Le Feu) by Henri Barbusse takes place in Northern France in 1915. It depicts the deadlocked armies of France and Germany along the Western Front. It opens in the Alps, with a group of intellectuals in antiseptic conditions in a Sanatorium foreseeing the horrors to come as 30 million soldiers will die. They peer into lush peaceful lowlands and perceive an apocalyptic Valley of Death.

Most of the novel is given over to a close-up investigation of conditions for a single squad of trench diggers. They are not the front line warriors in the first trenches, but work from the second line, moving up on demand when fortification is needed, and dropping back for rest periods at intervals. Cocon, the "Man of Figures," calculates late in the novel that the 17-man squad has been quartered in 47 villages in the Pas du Calais region at the norther tip of France. Of these, only a few are named and depicted: Ablain-Saint-Nazaire Argoval is in ruins. Souches, down the Béthune Rd. from the trenches, home to Poterloo, who is anxious to see it again; when the squad passes through a second time, it flattened, on the eve of the great battle for Hill 119.

Gauchin-l'Abbé is depicted in the most detail, for there the squad enjoys a long rest period. It is Brigade Headquarters and site of the court-martial, so lodging space is at a premium. Much of the army camps outside of town. The squad avoids staying in a barn by renting a small room under the table. Most stops, usually in unnamed locales, finds them sleeping in cold, drafty barns. It is while freezing in such a barn that Fouillade describes at length and in great detail his home in Southern France, on the Mediterranean. He hopes to return to his concubine in the village of Cette in L'Hérault (also referred to as the Midi). Old timers recall looting Soisson of food, drink, and firewood earlier in the war.

Another lighter moment is show before the final horrors, as squad members enjoy leave in Paris, where "shirkers" in uniform and civilian clothes annoy them with unanswerable questions about the front. Otherwise they enjoy window shopping and later calculate, when an attack begins, what people of leisure would be doing in the capital

Most of the novel takes place in the trenches, which are dug in parallel, ranging back from the fighting front in 15 lines. Some are abandoned, some are well-maintained and "bristling with men." The parallels are joined by"galleries" like ancient streets. The French Army alone has 10,000 km. (62,250 miles) of trenches, which the Germans match, and "the French front is only about one-eighth of the whole war-front of the world." Particular scenes are set in the Germans' abandoned Trench 97, the International Trench, the Covered Trench, and the New Trench, whose digging occurs during the worst of rainstorms, and the whole front becomes flooded and lethal. Of particular interest is The Refuge, a first aid station located at the hub of the complex system that reaches all parts of the sector. It is a claustrophobic two-level subterranean area for the wounded to rest after seeing doctors and while awaiting evacuation to a bigger clearing station in the trench along the Béthune Rd.

Language and Meaning

Under Fire: The Story of a Squad (Le Feu) by Henri Barbusse is translated into English by Fitzwater Wray. The spelling is American but particularly in dialog the flow is British. Published in 1917, it seems at times quaint, but the situation in which the characters try to survive overwhelms that sense. The anonymous narrator holds himself aloof for a few chapters before throwing himself into the action. He intimates without condescension that he is intellectually superior to his fellow poilus and may once have held rank before falling out with a non-com. He is capable of analytical thinking above them and when asked admits that he intends to write a book about their experiences. He will let characters speak naturally, thus incurring the wrath of censors and publishers, but will also use "big words" of truth when necessary.

The novel employs a former statistician, Cocon , to introduce masses of information whenever necessary. This "Man of Figures" computes the time necessary for any task and loves to share facts with others.. He lectures about the "arrangement and intricacy" of the trenches, the organization of the French Army in the minutest detail, and for levity's sake calculates how many pockets the squad members have in which to stuff belongings. There are passages in which Barbusse uses military jargon on purpose, while for the most part he writes for the average reader. The narrator depicts himself as a literary man, and his descriptions of nature are extraordinarily rich. Every scene is set in a particular atmosphere. The foul trenches are constantly show in new light, with soldiers offering similes for the consistency of the mud at different times. At one point, a confused officer even leads them through a cesspool, which elicits colorful remarks. Barbusse's descriptions of suffering and death are as vivid and graphic as anything being written 90 years later and aiming for maximum shock value. He makes it sound like most of these horrors have become everyday occurrences, almost overlooked.

The narrator meets with a variety of people of varying outlooks, allowing for diverse points of view on such matters as religion to be considered. The few survivors at the end, when the earth swallows up the front lines, discuss patriotism, nationalism, equality, and whether war can ever be done away with, covered in mud and exhausted, taking up subjects that pristine men in the Alps on the first day of war introduce.

Structure

Under Fire: The Story of a Squad (Le Feu) by Henri Barbusse consists of twenty-four numbered and titled chapters. There is no higher-level organization. The chapters vary radically in length, ranging from two pages to over fifty, the longest being like the novel itself entitled "Under Fire."

The opening chapter stands apart from the rest, showing the peaceful grandeur of the Alps on the day that World War I is declared. A handful of old men, drawn from the nations that will destroy 30 million of their sons in battle, foresee and decry this mass suicide and hope that this is the last of wars. In "The Vision," the seers in an antiseptic atmosphere worthy of the gods of Olympus, behold in the tranquil valley below them an

apocalypse of biblical proportions. They cannot decide whether humanity will learn from the coming disaster or forever go on destroying itself.

The following chapters focus on a single squad of poilus, infantrymen, beginning fifteen months into the conflict. They are not front-line combatants but second-line diggers and repairers of trenches. They have nothing to do by day but on demand face death at the front by night with their shovels and picks. Depiction of their actual labor is put off to the end. For most of the novel they are"In the Earth" or marching between postings. A host of them are introduced rapidly and developed gradually until most of them are dead. They come from all walks of life from the middle class down and live day-by-day, hoping to survive. There are relative optimists and relative pessimists. When not digging at the front, they are rotated back, and are shown competing for living space in the villages. The author manages to show all aspects of army life and the many ways in it is made miserable for the troops. Much space is given over to griping about everything.

Chapters 29-33 depict the pure hell of war in the battle for Hill 119 and the digging of a New Trench at the front. The novel is dedicated to Barbusse's comrades killed at this hill in 1915, and what they go through is most graphically told. He starts by describing the beauty of artillery bursts before they turn into a solid rain of metal. The savagery that overcomes survivors is emphasized. Barbusse then has the narrator, who is virtually unscathed, is in full control of his faculties, and has been established as a writer, describe the scattered and shattered dead and the maimed living in an aid station. Another shelling destroys it.

After a brief respite in Paris on leave, the squad finally goes out to dig a New Trench, and horrors greater than have yet been described befall them. Another barrage falls, but it is nature that swallows men up in a great flood. The few survivors discuss the war philosophically in "The Dawn," and prepare to fight some more. The discussions mirror Chapter 1 but the atmosphere is far from antiseptic.

Quotes

"MONT BLANC, the Dent du Midi, and the Aiguille Verte look across at the bloodless faces that show above the blankets along the gallery of the sanatorium. This roofed-in gallery of rustic wood-work on the first floor of the palatial hospital is isolated in Space and overlooks the world. The blankets of fine wool—red, green, brown, or white—from which those wasted cheeks and shining eyes protrude are quite still. No sound comes from the long couches except when some one coughs, or that of the pages of a book turned over at long and regular intervals, or the undertone of question and quiet answer between neighbors, or now and again the crescendo disturbance of a daring crow, escaped to the balcony from those flocks that seem threaded across the immense transparency like chaplets of black pearls.
"Silence is obligatory. Besides, the rich and high-placed who have come here from all the ends of the earth, smitten by the same evil, have lost the habit of talking. They have withdrawn into themselves, to think of their life and of their death.
"A servant appears in the balcony, dressed in white and walking softly. She brings newspapers and hands them about.
""It's decided," says the first to unfold his paper. 'War is declared.'" Chapter 1, The Vision, pg. 1.

"Yes, we are truly and deeply different from each other. But we are alike all the same. In spite of this diversity of age, of country, of education, of position, of everything possible, in spite of the former gulfs that kept us apart, we are in the main alike. Under the same uncouth outlines we conceal and reveal the same ways and habits, the same simple nature of men who have reverted to the state primeval.
"The same language, compounded of dialect and the slang of workshop and barracks, seasoned with the latest inventions, blends us in the sauce of speech with the massed multitudes of men who (for seasons now) have emptied France and crowded together in the North-East.
"Here, too, linked by a fate from which there is no escape, swept willy-nilly by the vast adventure into one rank, we have no choice but to go as the weeks and months go—alike. The terrible narrowness of the common life binds us close, adapts us, merges us one in the other. It is a sort of fatal contagion. Nor need you, to see how alike we soldiers are, be afar off—at that distance, say, when we are only specks of the dust-clouds that roll across the plain.
"We are waiting. Weary of sitting, we get up, our joints creaking like warping wood or old hinges. Damp rusts men as it rusts rifles; more slowly, but deeper. And we begin again, but not in the same way, to wait. In a state of war, one is always waiting. We have become waiting-machines. For the moment it is food we are waiting for. Then it will be the post. But each in its turn. When we have done with dinner we will think about the letters. After that, we shall set ourselves to wait for something else." Chapter 2, In the Earth, pg. 18.

"I turn my head away and say, almost under my breath, 'So, old chap, it's happened badly.'
"His smile dies at once, and he is serious: 'Eh, oui, old man; it can't be helped; it was

awful this time. Barbier is killed.'
" 'They told us—Barbier!'
" 'Saturday night it was, at eleven o'clock. He had the top of his back taken away by a shell,' says Marchal, 'cut off like a razor. Besse got a bit of shell that went clean through his belly and stomach. Barthlemy and Baubex got it in the head and neck. We passed the night skedaddling up and down the trench at full speed, to dodge the showers. And little Godefroy—did you know him?—middle of his body blown away. He was emptied of blood on the spot in an instant, like a bucket kicked over. Little as he was, it was remarkable how much blood he had, it made a stream at least fifty meters long. Gougnard got his legs cut up by one explosion. They picked him up not quite dead. That was at the listening post. I was there on duty with them. But when that shell fell I had gone into the trench to ask the time. I found my rifle, that I'd left in my place, bent double, as if some one had folded it in his hands, the barrel like a corkscrew, and half of the stock in sawdust. The smell of fresh blood was enough to bring your heart up.'
" 'And Mondain—him, too?'
" 'Mondain—that was the day after, yesterday in fact, in a dug-out that a shell smashed in. He was lying down, and his chest was crushed. Have they told you about Franco, who was alongside Mondain? The fall of earth broke his spine. He spoke again after they'd got him out and set him down. He said, with his head falling to one side, "I'm dying," and he was gone. Vigile was with them, too; his body wasn't touched, but they found him with his head completely flattened out, flat as a pancake, and huge-as big as that. To see it spread out on the ground, black and distorted, it made you think of his shadow—the shadow one gets on the ground sometimes when one walks with a lantern at night.'" Chapter 3, The Return, pgs. 49-50.

"He becomes loquacious. It is a low fever that inspires his dissertation, and condenses it to the slow swing of our walk, in which his step is already jaunty.
" 'They'll stick a red label on my greatcoat, you'll see, and take me to the rear. I shall be bossed this time by a very polite sort of chap, who'll say to me, "That's one side, now turn the other way—so, my poor fellow." Then the ambulance, and then the sick-train, with the pretty little ways of the Red Cross ladies all the way along, like they did to Crapelet Jules, then the base hospital. Beds with white sheets, a stove that snores in the middle of us all, people with the special job of looking after you, and that you watch doing it, regulation slippers—sloppy and comfortable—and a chamber-cupboard. Furniture! And it's in those big hospitals that you're all right for grub! I shall have good feeds, and baths. I shall take all I can get hold of. And there'll be presents—that you can enjoy without having to fight the others for them and get yourself into a bloody mess. I shall have my two hands on the counterpane, and they'll do damn well nothing, like things to look at—like toys, what? And under the sheets my legs'll be white-hot all the way through, and my trotters'll be expanding like bunches of violets.'
"Volpatte pauses, fumbles about, and pulls out of his pocket, along with his famous pair of Soissons scissors, something that he shows to me: 'Tiens, have you seen this?'
"It is a photograph of his wife and two children. He has already shown it to me many a time. I look at it and express appreciation.
" 'I shall go on sick-leave,' says Volpatte, 'and while my ears are sticking themselves on again, the wife and the little ones will look at me, and I shall look at them. And while they're growing again like lettuces, my friends, the war, it'll make progress—the

Russians—one doesn't know, what?' He is thinking aloud, lulling himself with happy anticipations, already alone with his private festival in the midst of us.
" 'Robber!' Feuillade shouts at him. 'You've too much luck, by God!'
"How could we not envy him? He would be going away for one, two, or three months; and all that time, instead of our wretched privations, he would be transformed into a man of means!
" 'At the beginning,' says Farfadet, 'it sounded comic when I heard them wish for a "good wound." But all the same, and whatever can be said about it, I understand now that it's the only thing a poor soldier can hope for if he isn't daft.'" Chapter 4, Volpatte and Fouillade, pgs. 56-57.

"The man puts his hand over his eyes, to retain the vision within. Nowadays, it is different.
"It was up there in the same place, later, that he came to know Clémence. She was just passing, the first time, sumptuous with sunshine, and so fair that the loose sheaf of straw she carried in her arms seemed to him nut-brown by contrast. The second time, she had a friend with her, and they both stopped to watch him. He heard them whispering, and turned towards them. Seeing themselves discovered, the two young women made off, with a sibilance of skirts, and giggles like the cry of a partridge.
"And it was there, too, that he and she together set up their home. Over its front travels a vine, which he coddled under a straw hat, whatever the season. By the garden gate stands the rose-tree that he knows so well—it never used its thorns except to try to hold him back a little as he went by.
"Will he return again to it all? Ah, he has looked too deeply into the profundity of the past not to see the future in appalling accuracy. He thinks of the regiment, decimated at each shift; of the big knocks and hard he has had and will have, of sickness, and of wear——
"He gets up and snorts, as though to shake off what was and what will be. He is back in the middle of the gloom, and is frozen and swept by the wind, among the scattered and dejected men who blindly await the evening. He is back in the present, and he is shivering still." Chapter 11, The Dog, pgs. 142-143.

"We go on through the tempest of wind and water. We seem to be going ever down and down, as in a pit. We slip and tumble, butt into the wall of the trench, into which we drive our elbows hard, so as to throw ourselves upright again. Our going is a sort of long slide, on which we keep up just how and where we can. What matters is to stumble only forward, and as straight as possible.
"Where are we? I lift my head, in spite of the billows of rain, out of this gulf where we are struggling. Against the hardly discernible background of the buried sky, I can make out the rim of the trench; and there, rising before my eyes all at once and towering over that rim, is something like a sinister doorway, made of two black posts that lean one upon the other, with something hanging from the middle like a torn-off scalp. It is the doorway.
'Forward! Forward!'
"I lower my head and see no more; but again I hear the feet that sink in the mud and come out again, the rattle of the bayonets, the heavy exclamations, and the rapid breathing.
"Once more there is a violent back-eddy. We pull up sharply, and again I am thrown upon Poterloo and lean on his back, his strong back and solid, like the trunk of a tree,

like healthfulness and like hope. He cries to me, 'Cheer up, old man, we're there!'
"We are standing still. It is necessary to go hack a little—Nom de Dieu!—no, we are moving on again!
"Suddenly a fearful explosion falls on us. I tremble to my skull; a metallic reverberation fills my head; a scorching and suffocating smell of sulfur pierces my nostrils. The earth has opened in front of me. I feel myself lifted and hurled aside—doubled up, choked, and half blinded by this lightning and thunder. But still my recollection is clear; and in that moment when I looked wildly and desperately for my comrade-in-arms, I saw his body go up, erect and black, both his arms outstretched to their limit, and a flame in the place of his head!" Chapter 12, The Doorway, pgs. 172-173.

"A sound of steps and of voices becomes distinct and draws nearer. From the mass of the four men who tightly hung up the burrow, tentative hands are put out at a venture. All at once Pépin murmurs in a stifled voice, 'What's this?'
" 'What?' ask the others, pressed and wedged against him.
" 'Clips!' says Pépin under his breath, 'Boche cartridge-clips on the shelf! We're in the Boche trench!'
" 'Let's hop it.' Three men make a jump to get out.
" 'Look out, bon Dieu! Don't stir!—footsteps ——'
"They hear some one walking, with the quick step of a solitary man. They keep still and bold their breath. With their eyes fixed on the ground level, they see the darkness moving on the right, and then a shadow with legs detaches itself, approaches, and passes. The shadow assumes an outline. It is topped by a helmet covered with a cloth and rising to a point. There is no other sound than that of his passing feet.
"Hardly has the German gone by when the four cooks, with no concerted plan and with a single movement, burst forth, jostling each other, run like madmen, and hurl themselves on him.
" 'Kamerad, messieurs!' he says.
"But the blade of a knife gleams and disappears. The man collapses as if he would plunge into the ground. Pépin seizes the helmet as the Boche is failing and keeps it in his hand.
" 'Let's leg it,' growls the voice of Poupardin.
" 'Got to search him first!'
"They lift him and turn him over, and set the soft, damp and warm body up again. Suddenly he coughs.
" 'He isn't dead!' — 'Yes, he is dead; that's the air.'
"They shake him by the pockets; with hasty breathing the four black men stoop over their task. 'The helmet's mine,' says Pépin. 'It was me that knifed him, I want the helmet.'
"They tear from the body its pocket-book of still warm papers, its field-glass, purse, and leggings.
" 'Matches!' shouts Blaire, shaking a box, 'he's got some!'
" 'Ah, the fool that you are!hisses Volpatte.
" 'Now let's be off like hell.' They pile the body in a corner and break into a run, prey to a sort of panic, and regardless of the row their disordered flight makes." Chapter 18, The Matches, pgs. 209-210.

"We resume our march, very slowly and very ponderously, scattered over the now graying road, with complaints and heavy curses which the effort strangles in our throats. After about a hundred yards, the two men of each team exchange loads, so that after two hundred yards, in spite of the bitter blenching breeze of early morning, all but the non-coms. are running with sweat.
"Suddenly a vivid star expands down yonder in the uncertain direction that we are taking—a rocket. Widely it lights a part of the sky with its milky nimbus, blots out the stars, and then falls gracefully, fairy-like.
"There is a swift light opposite us over there; a flash and a detonation. It is a shell! By the flat reflection that the explosion instantaneously spreads over the lower sky we see a ridge clearly outlined in front of us from east to west, perhaps half a mile away.
"That ridge is ours—so much of it as we can see from here and up to the top of it, where our troops are. On the other slope, a hundred yards from our first line, is the first German line. The shell fell on the summit, in our lines; it is the others who are firing. Another shell another and yet another plant trees of faintly violet light on the top of the rise, and each of them dully illumines the whole of the horizon.
"Soon there is a sparkling of brilliant stars and a sudden jungle of fiery plumes on the hill; and a fairy mirage of blue and white hangs lightly before our eyes in the full gulf of night.
"Those among us who must devote the whole buttressed power of their arms and legs to prevent their greasy loads from sliding off their backs and to prevent themselves from sliding to the ground, these neither see nor hear anything. The others, sniffing and shivering with cold, wiping their noses with limp and sodden handkerchiefs, watch and remark, cursing the obstacles in the way with fragments of profanity. 'It's like watching fireworks,' they say.
"And to complete the illusion of a great operatic scene, fairy-like but sinister, before which our bent and black party crawls and splashes, behold a red star, and then a green; then a sheaf of red fire, very much tardier. In our ranks, as the available half of our pairs of eyes watch the display, we cannot help murmuring in idle tones of popular admiration, 'Ah, a red one!' — 'Look, a green one!' It is the Germans who are sending up signals, and our men as well who are asking for artillery support." Chapter 19, The Bombardment, pgs. 213-214.

"Again I saw, when the dawn came down on us like a stormy evening, the steep banks of our crumbling trench as they came to life again under the sooty scarf of the low-hanging clouds, a trench dismal and dirty, infinitely dirty, humped with debris and filthiness. Under the livid sky the sandbags are taking the same hue, and their vaguely shining and rounded shapes are like the bowels and viscera of giants, nakedly exposed upon the earth.
In the trench-wall behind me, in a hollowed recess, there is a heap of horizontal things like logs. Tree-trunks? No, they are corpses.
"As the call of birds goes up from the furrowed ground, as the shadowy fields are renewed, and the light breaks and adorns each blade of grass, I look towards the ravine. Below the quickening field and its high surges of earth and burned hollows, beyond the bristling of stakes, there is still a lifeless lake of shadow, and in front of the opposite slope a wall of night still stands.
"Then I turn again and look upon these dead men whom the day is gradually exhuming,

revealing their stained and stiffened forms. There are four of them. They are our comrades, Lamuse, Barque, Biquet, and little Eudore. They rot there quite near us, blocking one half of the wide, twisting, and muddy furrow that the living must still defend.
"They have been laid there as well as may be, supporting and crushing each other. The topmost is wrapped in a tent-cloth. Handkerchiefs had been placed on the faces of the others; but in brushing against them in the dark without seeing them, or even in the daytime without noticing them, the handkerchiefs have fallen, and we are living face to face with these dead, heaped up there like a wood-pile." Chapter 20, Under Fire, pgs. 232-233.

"We are ready. The men marshal themselves, still silently, their blankets crosswise, the helmet-strap on the chin, leaning on their rifles. I look at their pale, contracted, and reflective faces. They are not soldiers, they are men. They are not adventurers, or warriors, or made for human slaughter, neither butchers nor cattle. They are laborers and artisans whom one recognizes in their uniforms. They are civilians uprooted, and they are ready. They await the signal for death or murder; but you may see, looking at their faces between the vertical gleams of their bayonets, that they are simply men.
"
Each one knows that he is going to take his head, his chest, his belly, his whole body, and all naked, up to the rifles pointed forward, to the shells, to the bombs piled and ready, and above all to the methodical and almost infallible machine-guns—to all that is waiting for him yonder and is now so frightfully silent—before he reaches the other soldiers that he must kill. They are not careless of their lives, like brigands, nor blinded by passion like savages. In spite of the doctrines with which they have been cultivated they are not inflamed. They are above instinctive excesses. They are not drunk, either physically or morally. It is in full consciousness, as in full health and full strength, that they are massed there to hurl themselves once more into that sort of madman's part imposed on all men by the madness of the human race. One sees the thought and the fear and the farewell that there is in their silence, their stillness, in the mask of tranquility which unnaturally grips their faces. They are not the kind of hero one thinks of, but their sacrifice has greater worth than they who have not seen them will ever be able to understand.
"They are waiting; a waiting that extends and seems eternal. Now and then one or another starts a little when a bullet, fired from the other side, skims the forward embankment that shields us and plunges into the flabby flesh of the rear wall.
"The end of the day is spreading a sublime but melancholy light on that strong unbroken mass of beings of whom some only will live to see the night. It is raining—there is always rain in my memories of all the tragedies of the great war. The evening is making ready, along with a vague and chilling menace; it is about to set for men that snare that is as wide as the world. Chapter 20, Under Fire, pgs. 250-251.

"In the distance, black shell-smoke goes up in scrolls. then detonates over the horizon. The wide and stippled flight of an army of crows sweeps the sky.
"Down below among the motionless multitude, and identifiable by their wasting and disfigurement, there are zouaves, tirailleurs, and Foreign Legionaries from the May attack. The extreme end of our lines was then on Berthonval Wood, five or six

kilometers from here. In that attack, which was one of the most terrible of the war or of any war, those men got here in a single rush. They thus formed a point too far advanced in the wave of attack, and were caught on the flanks between the machine-guns posted to right and to left on the lines they had overshot. It is some months now since death hollowed their eyes and consumed their cheeks, but even in those storm-scattered and dissolving remains one can identify the havoc of the machine-guns that destroyed them, piercing their backs and loins and severing them in the middle. By the side of heads black and waxen as Egyptian mummies, clotted with grubs and the wreckage of insects, where white teeth still gleam in some cavities, by the side of poor darkening stumps that abound like a field of old roots laid bare, one discovers naked yellow skulls wearing the red cloth fez, whose gray cover has crumbled like paper. Some thigh-bones protrude from the heaps of rags stuck together with reddish mud; and from the holes filled with clothes shredded and daubed with a sort of tar, a spinal fragment emerges. Some ribs are scattered on the soil like old cages broken; and close by, blackened leathers are afloat, with water-bottles and drinking-cups pierced and flattened. About a cloven knapsack, on the top of some bones and a cluster of bits of cloth and accouterments, some white points are evenly scattered; by stooping one can see that they are the finger and toe constructions of what was once a corpse.
"Sometimes only a rag emerges from long mounds to indicate that some human being was there destroyed, for all these unburied dead end by entering the soil.
"The Germans, who were here yesterday, abandoned their soldiers by the side of ours without interring them— as witness these three putrefied corpses on the top of each other, in each other, with their round gray caps whose red edge is hidden with a gray band, their yellow-gray jackets, and their green faces. I look for the features of one of them. From the depth of his neck up to the tufts of hair that stick to the brim of his cap is just an earthy mass, the face become an anthill, and two rotten berries in place of the eyes. Another is a dried emptiness flat on its belly, the back in tatters that almost flutter, the hands, feet, and face enrooted in the soil." Chapter 20, Under Fire, pgs. 273-274.

"I cannot say how long I wandered with the group with which I had remained. We went into morasses. We strained our sight forward in quest of the embankment and the trench of salvation, towards the ditch that was somewhere there, as towards a harbor.
"A cry of consolation was heard at last through the vapors of war and the elements—'A trench!' But the embankment of that trench was moving; it was made of men mingled in confusion, who seemed to be coming out and abandoning it.
" 'Don't stay there, mates!' cried the fugitives; 'clear off, don't come near. It's hell—everything's collapsing—the trenches are legging it and the dug-outs are bunged up—the mud's pouring in everywhere. There won't be any trenches by the morning—it's all up with them about here!'
"They disappeared. Where? We forgot to ask for some little direction from these men whose streaming shapes had no sooner appeared than they were swallowed up in the dark.
"Even our little group crumbled away among the devastation, no longer knowing where they were. Now one, now another, faded into the night, disappearing towards his chance of escape.
"We climbed slopes and descended them. I saw dimly in front of me men bowed and hunchbacked, mounting a slippery incline where mud held them back, and the wind and

rain repelled them under a dome of cloudy lights.
"Then we flowed back, and plunged into a marsh up to our knees. So high must we lift our feet that we walked with a sound of swimming. Each forward stride was an enormous effort which slackened in agony.
"It was there that we felt death drawing near. But we beached ourselves at last on a sort of clay embankment that divided the swamp. As we followed the slippery back of this slender island along, I remember that once we had to stoop and steer ourselves by touching some half-buried corpses, so that we should not be thrown down from the soft and sinuous ridge. My hand discovered shoulders and hard backs, a face cold as a helmet, and a pipe still desperately bitten by dead jaws.
"As we emerged and raised our heads at a venture we heard the sound of voices not far away. 'Voices! Ah, voices!' They sounded tranquil to us, as though they called us by our names, and we all came close together to approach this fraternal murmuring of men.
"The words became distinct. They were quite near—in the hillock that we could dimly see like an oasis: and yet we could not hear what they said. The sounds were muddled, and we did not understand them.
" 'What are they saying?' asked one of us in a curious tone.
"Instinctively we stopped trying to find a way in. A doubt, a painful idea was seizing us. Then, clearly enunciated, there rang out these words—'Achtung! — Zweites Geschütz - Schuss——' Farther back, the report of a gun answered the telephonic command.
Chapter 23, The Fatigue-Party, pgs. 329-331.

"Waking, Paradis and I look at each other, and remember. We return to life and daylight as in a nightmare. In front of us the calamitous plain is resurrected, where hummocks vaguely appear from their immersion, the steel-like plain that is rusty in places and shines with lines and pools of water, while bodies are strewn here and there in the vastness like foul rubbish, prone bodies that breathe or rot.
"Paradis says to me, 'That's war.'
" 'Yes, that's it,' he repeats in a far-away voice, 'that's war. It's not anything else.'
"He means—and I am with him in his meaning — 'More than attacks that are like ceremonial reviews, more than visible battles unfurled like banners, more even than the hand-to-hand encounters of shouting strife, War is frightful and unnatural weariness, water up to the belly, mud and dung and infamous filth. It is befouled faces and tattered flesh, it is the corpses that are no longer like corpses even, floating on the ravenous earth. It is that, that endless monotony of misery, broken, by poignant tragedies; it is that, and not the bayonet glittering like silver, nor the bugle's chanticleer call to the sun!'
"Paradis was so full of this thought that he ruminated a memory, and growled, 'D'you remember the woman in the town where we went about a bit not so very long ago? She talked some drivel about attacks, and said, "How beautiful they must be to see!"'
"A chasseur who was full length on his belly, flattened out like a cloak, raised his bead out of the filthy background in which it was sunk, and cried, 'Beautiful? Oh, hell! It's just as if an ox were to say, "What a fine sight it must be, all those droves of cattle driven forward to the slaughter-house!"' He spat out mud from his besmeared mouth, and his unburied face was like a beast's.
" 'Let them say, "It must be,"' he sputtered in a strange jerky voice, grating and ragged; 'that's all right. But beautiful! Oh, hell!'
"Writhing under the idea, he added passionately, 'It's when they say things like that that

they hit us hardest of all!' He spat again, hut exhausted by his effort he fell back in his bath of mud, and laid his head in his spittle." Chapter 24, The Dawn, pgs. 338-339.

Topics for Discussion

The characters debate whether civilians can understand what they have gone through. Does the narrator communicate a sense or is direct experience required? Support your answer by analyzing at least two passages.

How are nationalism and patriotism treated in the novel? Have attitudes changed since 1917?

What role does Eudoxie play in the novel? Is she an integral character?

What is Cocon's function in the novel? Is he an integral character?

Which battle death most affects the narrator—and why is this so? Which one most affects you?

How do the poilus view "shirkers"? Is their criticism just? Could an army do without support services?

The novel is published in 1917. Do the philosophical passages foresee as inevitable a World War II two decades later or do they allow for unmet conditions that could prevent it?

How do the mud-caked survivors at the end of the novel fulfill what the pristine seers in the first chapter discuss? What is the lesson of World War I?