

## Passage Option 2: "Over the Top"

"Over the Top," by Sgt. Arthur Empey is written as a first person account of life as a soldier fighting with the British in World War One. The passage goes into the mentality of a common soldier partaking in trench warfare between the United Kingdom and Germany. Empey's highly specific and descriptive emphasis on every action proves the effects of war on all soldiers are detrimental and life lasting.

"Over the Top" shows how countries can become greatly united in time of war. At the same time, the identity of the country replaces the identity of the individual, especially the soldiers who are represented as dispensable. Because all the British soldiers are called "Tommy," the reader interprets them as virtual Pawns in a chess match. However, the soldiers seem to be comfortable with this given identity because it makes them part of something bigger than themselves. Tommy stands for the British citizens and the security of a nation they call home. In short, the title "Tommy" is both positive and negative for the same reason, that it replaces one's individuality with the struggle of a whole nation to stay united and unbroken.

Empey's use of graphic and descriptive language further emphasizes the effect on a soldier's life to the reader. Life in the trenches shows the general uncertainty and insecurity of the common soldier's fate upon entering "No Mans Land." The soldier admits he doesn't expect to make it back home and if so not in the same shape as before. "'Ten minutes to go!' Ten minutes to live! We were shivering all over" (Empey). The brutal, barbaric scene of the Prussian wildly fighting against three Tommies is the best example provided. Overall, the war and life in the trenches is depicted as gloomy and deliriously nauseating as the stomach never settles with death lurking.

"Over the Top" can be graphic and persuasive support for a Nations leader like the President of the United States to avoid war and stay uninvolved at almost all costs. The agony of war and its lasting effects on soldiers before, during and after the war along with those on the families of them are a great deterrent for a nation to go to war. However, the benefits from a victory can be substantially far greater in the economic viewpoint. A whole nation on the verge of falling apart or losing International influence and power can gain respect by doing well in times of war. "Over the Top" is a precursor to what the reality of many American soldiers lives would soon come to know and dread and provides insight to the American people as to what war really entails.