**A Farewell to Arms   
 Historical Context**

**The Life and Times of Ernest Hemingway**

**1890s**  
Ernest Miller Hemingway is born on July 21, 1899, in Oak Park, Illinois.

**1910s**Woodrow Wilson is elected president, 1912.   
World War I begins in 1914, ends in 1918.   
Hemingway serves as an ambulance driver in 1918; he is wounded, July.

**1920s**Prohibition goes into effect in January 1920.   
Hemingway marries Hadley Richardson, and moves to Paris, 1921.   
James Joyce's *Ulysses*published in Paris, 1922.   
*A Farewell to Arms*published; Hemingway's father commits suicide, 1929.

**1930s**Hemingway's two memoirs, *Death in the Afternoon*and *Green Hills of Africa*, published, 1932 and 1935.   
Adolf Hitler becomes chancellor of Germany, 1933.   
Hemingway travels as a war correspondent to the Spanish Civil War, 1937-38.

**1940s**  
The first inexpensive paperback appears; *For Whom the Bell Tolls*published, 1940.   
Japanese forces bomb Pearl Harbor, 1941; America enters World War II.   
Hemingway travels with American troops as a correspondent.

**1950s**  
The Old Man and the Sea published, 1952.   
Hemingway awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature,1954.   
Gen. Charles de Gaulle becomes French premier, 1957, and remains in power until 1969.

**1960s**  
John F. Kennedy elected president, 1960.   
U.S. breaks diplomatic relations with Cuba, 1961. Hemingway commits suicide in Ketchum, Idaho, on July 2, 1961.   
*A Moveable Feast*edited by Hemingway's fourth wife and published, 1964.

"I could remember Catherine but I knew I would get crazy if I thought about her when I was not sure yet I would see her, so I would not think about her, only about her a little, only about her with the car going slowly and clickingly, and some light through the canvas and my lying with Catherine on the floor of the car."   
-from *A Farewell to Arms*

**Hemingway and World War I**

When the United States declared war on Germany and entered World War I in April 1917, the fighting in Europe had been going on for three years. America joined the Allies, led by France, England, Russia, and Italy, who had been fighting Germany, Austria-Hungary, and the Ottoman Empire (Turkey). Antiquated nineteenth-century battlefield tactics combined with the innovations of modern warfare led to a monumental loss of life. At the Battle of the Somme in July 1916, British forces launched a relentless barrage of ordnance on German trenches that lasted six days. British soldiers were quickly killed by machine gun and rifle fire. By the time the battle ended, Britain had suffered 400,000 casualties; the French 200,000; and 450,000 Germans also lay dead in what was one of the bloodiest battles ever.

By 1917, however, such atrocities had not touched America. Heeding President Wilson's admonition to "make the world safe for Democracy," young American boys enlisted in droves. While the public could "Beat Back the Hun with Liberty Bonds," these young men saw a chance to be a part of history-the "War to End All Wars."

Ernest Hemingway was determined to be part of the action, but an eye defect kept him out of the main branches of the military. Hemingway was undaunted. In April 1918 he applied to the Red Cross to drive ambulances in Italy and was accepted. He passed his physical exam and was fitted for a uniform that gave him the honorary rank of 1st Lieutenant.

Hemingway arrived in Milan in early June and was stationed at Schio in the Dolomite hills northwest of Venice. He saw little action. Frustrated, and with a desire to be closer to the front, Hemingway requested transfer to the Red Cross's "rolling canteen" service, which operated along the more contested Piave River.

He had only been in Italy for about two weeks when he was nearly killed just after midnight on July 12, 1918, while distributing chocolate and cigarettes. The fragments of an Austrian trench mortar shell (called a *Minenwerfer*) ripped into Hemingway's legs and killed several men around him. Despite his own wounds, he heaved one injured man into a fireman's carry and began to move him back toward the command post. A machine gun then ripped open Hemingway's right knee. The two men collapsed but somehow made it to safety. For this feat, Hemingway would later be awarded the Italian Croce di Guerra-the silver medal for valor.

**If you're interested in World War I, you might also enjoy reading:***Three Soldiers*by John Dos Passos (1921)   
*The Enormous Room*by E. E. Cummings (1922)  
*All Quiet on the Western Front*by Erich Maria Remarque (1929)  
*Good-Bye to All That*by Robert Graves (1929)

"In stories about the war I try to show all the different sides of it, taking it slowly and honestly and examining it from many ways. So never think one story represents my viewpoint because it is much too complicated for that."   
-Ernest Hemingway, to Russian critic Ivan Kashkin, 1939