

Sebastian Faulks

Literature



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

This section of the book is an extremely descriptive yet emotional account of what happened at the front line. Faulks is able to describe the horror of what happened in a subjective manner, making the account an extremely personal episode. The amount of information given to us is very overwhelming, making us feel helpless and shocked. In most historical books or other war novels, we are given very strict accounts of the war, with facts and figures and rarely any names are mentioned let alone their past and families.

In giving us brief background information on some of the soldiers and the technique he uses to describe the war scene; through the eyes of the other soldiers, makes it an enormously emotional account. To build up tension, Faulks tends to use rather short, blunt sentences. We naturally read these parts at a fast pace, being able to feel an ounce of the fear that the soldiers were experiencing. Faulks is not at all subtle in his descriptions of those wounded or killed. He's graphic details makes our stomach churn at the thought of such horrific and brutal deaths.

The passage on page 236 is an extremely moving and effective description. The long list of unanswered names makes a deeper impact of the countless number of men that were so inhumanely killed. It is even more unimaginable for us to try and comprehend how the family would react to such heart wrenching news. These are circumstances beyond our comprehension, let alone the comprehension of family and friends of those lost.

Men who were not even part of the fight, who just saw what was going on around them lost their faith. " Horrocks pulled the silver cross from his chest

and hurled it from him", this just shows if the Chaplain was unable to keep his faith, it was not surprising that other soldiers may have felt that God had turned His back on them. " Nothing was divine anymore; everything was profane", the soldiers were left in a state of confusion, everything they had been taught, believed about their religion was literally being shot down.

To have to see the men who had befriended over a year or so mercilessly killed must be an extremely traumatising scene to see. Some were effected in the opposite way, they sought refuge in God. " Petrossian clasping a silver cross", men like Petrossian held onto the hope and need to see their family and friends again. The only reason some of them wanted to win this war was not for the sake of their country, but to be able to be with loved ones again.

After going through such mentally and physically traumatising events, the soldiers began to forget any form of value given towards other human beings. They had been taught to just keep going and shoot anything that got in their way. " Death had no meaning", what one fears most in their life time has become meaningless to those who see their friends being mutilated in front of their eyes. The soldiers had hardened to the lose of life, they had been desensitised through these experiences, " he felt nothing as he crossed the pitted land on which humps of khaki lay every few yards". Even when the men thought that they had become accustomed to such horrific scenes, there were moments where their minds were saturated, " he was unmoved by violence, hardened to the mutilation he had seen and inflicted, but what he was watching here was something of a different order".

Life would never be the same again for those who did survive this war. Some even began to believe that it would be worse for them to survive with these memories, than die there and then. " What he longed for was an end to the day and to the new, unliveable reality it had brought", the soldiers could only take each day as it came, not being able to look beyond the next day, as each day was so unpredictable.

Every day they had the same hope; to survive till the next morning. Some may even have to continue their lives with a feeling of constant guilt if they were to survive. " What have we done", the soldiers seem to naturally take responsibility for what really was their actions, but not their control. It is not surprising that they felt anger towards the futility of these actions, to the commands made by the officers and their mottoes; " when in doubt go forward".

What we are presented with in this section of the novel is normal human beings being commanded to do the extraordinary, " they had proved that you could be human but act in a way that was beyond nature". By the end of these pages we as a reader feel exhausted, by the atmospheric events we encounter. Our exhaustion makes us reconsider how the soldiers were able to comprehend such futile events.