

Base Details by Siegfried Sassoon

Base Details

IF I were fierce, and bald, and short of breath,
 I'd live with scarlet Majors at the Base,
 And speed glum heroes up the line to death.
 You'd see me with my puffy petulant face,
 Guzzling and gulping in the best hotel,
 Reading the Roll of Honour. 'Poor young chap,'
 I'd say—I used to know his father well;
 Yes, we've lost heavily in this last scrap.'
 And when the war is done and youth stone dead,
 I'd toddle safely home and die – in bed.

Siegfried Sassoon (1886–1967).

1. What do the words 'fierce, and bald, and short of breath' suggest about the type of person the poet is describing?
2. What two things might the word 'scarlet' refer to in the second line?
3. Why are the soldiers described as 'glum heroes'?
4. What do the alliterative phrases 'puffy petulant' and 'guzzling and gulping' imply about the character described in the poem?
5. Why is the phrase "poor young chap" both patronising and insufficient as a comment on a soldier's death?
6. What does the line "I used to know his father well" imply about the type of man this soldier is?
7. What does the word 'scrap' suggest about the war?
8. How do the last two lines show the contrast between the soldier described and the young soldiers at the Front?
9. Look again at the title of the poem. What two meanings can the word 'base' have which Sassoon might be trying to convey in his poem?
10. How do you respond to the poem? In other words, do you like it? Explain your ideas fully.