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| Siegfried Sassoon (1886–1967) **Counter-Attack**   |  |  | | --- | --- | | WE’D gained our first objective hours before |  | | While dawn broke like a face with blinking eyes, |  | | Pallid, unshaved and thirsty, blind with smoke. |  | | Things seemed all right at first. We held their line, |  | | With bombers posted, Lewis guns well placed, | *5* | | And clink of shovels deepening the shallow trench. |  | | The place was rotten with dead; green clumsy legs |  | | High-booted, sprawled and grovelled along the saps |  | | And trunks, face downward, in the sucking mud, |  | | Wallowed like trodden sand-bags loosely filled; | *10* | | And naked sodden buttocks, mats of hair, |  | | Bulged, clotted heads slept in the plastering slime. |  | | And then the rain began,—the jolly old rain! |  | |  |  | | A yawning soldier knelt against the bank, |  | | Staring across the morning blear with fog; | *15* | | He wondered when the Allemands would get busy; |  | | And then, of course, they started with five-nines |  | | Traversing, sure as fate, and never a dud. |  | | Mute in the clamour of shells he watched them burst |  | | Spouting dark earth and wire with gusts from hell, | *20* | | While posturing giants dissolved in drifts of smoke. |  | | He crouched and flinched, dizzy with galloping fear, |  | | Sick for escape,—loathing the strangled horror |  | | And butchered, frantic gestures of the dead. |  | |  |  | | An officer came blundering down the trench: | *25* | | ‘Stand-to and man the fire-step!’ On he went... |  | | Gasping and bawling, ‘Fire-step ... counter-attack!’ |  | | Then the haze lifted. Bombing on the right |  | | Down the old sap: machine-guns on the left; |  | | And stumbling figures looming out in front. | *30* | | ‘O Christ, they’re coming at us!’ Bullets spat, |  | | And he remembered his rifle ... rapid fire... |  | | And started blazing wildly ... then a bang |  | | Crumpled and spun him sideways, knocked him out |  | | To grunt and wriggle: none heeded him; he choked | *35* | | And fought the flapping veils of smothering gloom, |  | | Lost in a blurred confusion of yells and groans... |  | | Down, and down, and down, he sank and drowned, |  | | Bleeding to death. The counter-attack had failed. |  | |