It is the weaknesses of Tommo that causes the death of Charlie Peaceful. Discuss.

Throughout the novel 'Private Peaceful' by Michael Morpurgo, the nature of Tommo as a character has been explored on many levels. In some ways, the weakness shown in Tommo's character is responsible for Charlie’s death. However, there are also other important contributing factors such as the cruel attitude of Sergeant Hanley and Charlie Peaceful’s resistant behaviour towards authority.

Tommo always struggled to look after himself and Charlie would often have to intervene in order to protect him. In some respects, it is Tommo’s lack of independence that makes him vulnerable and in constant need of Charlie’s help. “He just goes on kicking me on my back, on my legs, anywhere he can. When he finally stops I wonder why. I look up to see Charlie grabbing him around the neck and pulling him to the ground”. Even in the schoolyard, Charlie would always step in and protect Tommo, and would be almost proud to receive the harsh punishment afterwards. “…when its Charlie’s turn, all we hear are the whacks, and then the silences in between”. Tommo was always proud of his brother Charlie, but it wasn’t going to be enough to clear his emerging record as a troublemaker. As the novel progresses, the Peaceful family find themselves slowly sinking into poverty and so, the boys decide to go poaching as a way to collect meat for the family. Even though it was Charlie’s idea, Tommo fails along with the plan. When Molly falls ill, it’s up to Tommo to keep lookout for Charlie and unfortunately, he falls asleep, causing them to be caught by Lambert and his dog. However, Charlie is the one that is punished and soon, the whole town believes that Charlie is untrustworthy. Further consequence, Charlie is not approved by Molly’s parents and things become complicated and they are forced to meet secretly. Even though Tommo’s weakness of character often lands his brother in trouble, it is not the only reason that contributed to the death of Charlie Peaceful.
A wave of violence, destruction, death and hatred was sweeping through the country and it was only a matter of time before it would reach the Peaceful family. Proved to be a very significant theme throughout the novel and revealed the true nature of both Charlie and Tommo. After Charlie was forced to enlist with the threat of the Peaceful family being evicted from their cottage, Tommo decided to join him and soon enough, they were off to Exeter to complete their initial military training. All was going well until they were sent to France and were subject to the cruel leadership of Sergeant “Horrible” Hanley. Sergeant Hanley had zero tolerance and took great satisfaction in punishing soldiers who challenged his decisions. “I’ve got my eye on you Peaceful. You’re a troublemaker, always have been. I’m warning you, one step out of line...” pg 164. Of course Charlie Peaceful was his favourite target. Tommo and Charlie valued their loyalty and trust above all else and it was Sergeant Hanley that forced Charlie to make the decision that would result in his death. They were in the middle of battle; in an abandoned German dugout; like sitting ducks, they waited for an opportunity to escape. Sergeant Hanley gave the order for them all to drive the attack and then stand their ground. “You take us out there now and their machine guns’ll just mow us down. They’ve seen us go in here, and they’ll be waiting for us to come out...Maybe we should stay here and then go back after dark.” pg 172 Charlie knew it was suicide and tried everything he could to reason with the Sergeant. To make things more difficult, Tommo was wounded and had no hope of making it on the battlefield. Charlie knew what he had to do but the Sergeant just didn’t understand. “…I’m telling you Peaceful, that if you don’t come with us when we go, it won’t just be field punishment again. It’ll be a court martial for you. It’ll be the firing squad.” pg 172. Charlie made his decision and stayed true to Tommo. Sergeant Hanley had given him no choice but to face death should he survive and make it home to England.

Charlie, in a number of ways, was also responsible for his own death as his resistance against authority was what started his record of misbehaviour. To the eyes of his friends, Charlie was a hero, a brother, a guardian, a leader and a friend. Even though some of the soldiers in his company didn’t agree with him stirring up Hanley with his cheeky remarks, they all respected him for the man he was. Charlie’s stubbornness was clear from the beginning. “Charlie looks him
straight in the eye in open defiance and does not look away, just as he used to do with Mr. Munnings at school when he was being ticked off”. pg 171. He wouldn’t stand for any injustice and was extremely protective of his family. Unfortunately, he was also proud of his cheeky attitude and was always pushing the boundaries. Even when he has the idea to go poaching on the Colonel’s land and gets caught, deep down he feels that he did it for the right reasons and for the sake of feeding his family. The problem itself was not just his attitude but the fact that he never quite went about things the right way. Charlie perceived authority as a challenge; an opportunity to fight against injustice. “Right from the very start Sergeant Hanley had it in for Charlie. And that was because Charlie just wouldn’t jump through hoops like the rest of us” pg 106. Sergeant Hanley perceived Charlie as a disrespectful troublemaker and didn’t appreciate his spirited attitude. Charlie knew that his job was to provide and care for his family. He was always there for Tommo and tried everything he could to get back at the cruel world around him and to revolt against the people responsible. It was his passion for justice and his family loyalty that made him hungry for freedom and resistant towards the confines of authority.

The death of Charlie Peaceful symbolised a great injustice and was not merely caused by one thing. Tommo’s weaknesses may have lead Charlie into a bit of trouble but it was Sergeant Hanley that forced Charlie to choose between following the rules of authority and his loyalty to his brother. Tommo in faced with a decision that he knew would mean his death, it is difficult to blame Charlie himself. It was the strength of both Tommo and Charlie that kept them alive and it was the harsh environment of war that lead Charlie to make an impossible decision which lead to his unjust death.