

January 1917...

It's the first letter John Faban has received from his son, Walter, since the New Year. The letter gives reassurance that Walter is alive and doing well in the trenches, although "doing well" is a relative term. You see Walter has just had a most frightening experience, one that saw him almost become the next name on Brandon's 'Roll of Honour' ...

Walter and his mates are happily sat inside their underground dug out where it is safer than being up in the trenches. Their comfort is disturbed when the face of an officer appears. He orders Walter and two other lads to leave their sanctuary and fetch some grenades. This is not what the lads want to hear, yet they dare not question the order, nor enquire of the fate of those who previously attempted the task. They exit their dug out and peer over the top of the trench. The officer points them in the direction of the grenades and then they are out in open ground, literally running for their lives. Perhaps the enemy are not looking because the lads get to the grenades unmolested. Scooping up the explosives they then turn back and head toward safety, covering ground at break neck speed. Walter sees one mate fall to the ground. Momentarily he pauses to confirm the lad has been shot, and then he himself is hit. The bullet strikes his mess tin so he is saved from injury, but he knows the enemy sniper has him in his sights and will not miss a second time. Walter needs to hide, but where? He dives down into a shell crater and is out of sight from the hunter.

Minutes tick by and after a fashion Walter thinks about leaving the crater. He lies still for a while longer just to be sure. More minutes tick by. It has been quiet for some time now so perhaps he should make his move? That will be easier said than done. The crater has no floor and is filled with a thick quagmire of mud, which acts like glue wrapping itself around him. The more he tries to extricate himself the more he feels himself getting pulled down. He has heard stories of men drowning in mud never to be seen again, so he tries with every muscle to break free of its grasp. It works, although his clothing is almost pulled from him in the process. Walter now crawls to the top of the crater and peers over, half expecting to hear a gunshot. There is none. Crawling over the top and on his stomach for some distance he leaves the crater behind and slowly heads back toward safety.

Back in Brandon John Faban knows his son is one of the lucky ones. His neighbour's son is also one of the lucky ones. Arthur Secker was buried deep in mud by an exploding artillery shell. He managed to dig himself out and as he got to the surface another artillery shell buried him a second time. He endured ninety minutes of artillery shells exploding around him before assistance arrived. With the New Year comes renewed hope that this year will see the end of war. Can the lads really endure another year of war? One thing is for sure, there are Brandon lads riding their luck at the moment and that will only last for so long.