

Monday 3rd July, 1916...

A few nights ago Stanley Lingwood was in 'No Man's Land' cutting barbed wire and preparing for the first day of battle on the Somme. Today he is burying the dead and witnessing the aftermath of just two days fighting. Friend and foe alike require burial, although the latter is done without ceremony. With the prospect of many more battles being drawn up for the weeks ahead, Stanley, and the other Brandon lads, will be lucky to get through unscathed. This is the price paid for volunteering to fight for King and country, but no one could have predicted how devastating it would be. Like ripples across the Channel, each new day brings further news of our lads killed or wounded in the war.

Most of the lads, upon leaving Brandon at the start of war, went into the same battalion of the Norfolk Regiment and have stayed together at the Front. This weekend the Somme took its toll on that battalion, with one hundred and three men slaughtered in barely ten hours of fighting. Three Brandon lads were among that number. The battle took the lives of William Lingwood and Frederick Talbot. In doing so it robbed four young children of their father and two women of a husband. Before the war Frank Mutum's family were accustomed to seeing him walk through the door after a hard day's labouring on the fields. That scene will never be repeated because Frank is gone too, his body never identified in the aftermath.

More Brandon men, serving in other regiments along the Somme, were slaughtered too. Alfred Field, cut down by a German machine gun, will never be seen in Brandon again. Nor will Albert Carter. Albert, a career soldier for many years before the war, proved that experience counts for nothing if you are in the wrong place, at the wrong time. This war has now robbed his mother of two sons. Cyril Burton, while spearheading a grenade attack deep along enemy trenches, was mortally wounded. His comrades halted their attack long enough to apply a tourniquet to his leg before they continued forward. Cyril, left alone, was never seen again. In those few hours six Brandon men ceased to exist, and dozens more were wounded, living to fight another day - Grass, Talbot, Randall, Crocker, Arbour, Glaister, Docking... the list goes on. Men who will be patched up and sent back to dodge the bullets and shrapnel.

Stanley Lingwood appreciates life in Brandon has to carry on, of course it must, but it is a world away from him. Back home the long summer days signal the start of the Sunday School parades. Excited children will assemble on the Market Hill and, accompanied by their teachers and parents, will then proceed down to the railway meadow for sports and games. Children will revel in their glory at winning a race and losers will console themselves with a ride on Mr Ashley's swing boats. When all are suitably worn out, they will head up to Mr Lee-Barber's huge Maltings by the river for a magnificent tea. They may even go for a quick paddle in the shallow river to cool their weary feet. The day will culminate with a lantern-lit procession back to the Market Hill. The organisers' main concern will be the weather is kind to them and they will not have to dodge the rain and summer downpours.