

30th June 1916, late evening, somewhere in “No Man’s Land” ...

An enemy’s flare illuminates the night sky and beneath it Stanley Lingwood lies motionless on the ground, knowing that any movement will likely reveal his position. The flare eventually dies down and Stanley, along with three comrades, springs to life, cutting away at lines of barbed wire and pulling wooden posts from the ground. Their lives depend upon them working quickly but in utmost silence. Dozens of other Brandon lads’ lives depend upon them too. You see, Stanley is preparing the ground for what will be the start of a huge offensive in the morning.

Those other Brandon lads, just like Stanley, joined up at the start of war, but unlike him they are now sat in the relative safety of a trench. Some attempt a few hours rest, perhaps even sleep, while others try to distract themselves by writing home for what might be the last time. Stanley’s older brother William, who was a career soldier before the war and was called back to the Colours when war was declared, is writing home to his wife, “ *No doubt you will know the reason in a few days’ time if you watch the papers. I hope you won’t worry over it, but this may be the last time I shall write to you, for you never can tell what may happen. But let us hope we shall all get through safely ... Remember me to all inquiring friends.*”

Stanley and his comrades, still out in No Man’s Land, have just completed their mission. Keeping as low as they possibly can, they make their way back to a nearby trench and from there they will navigate back to their unit. Suddenly the night’s peace is violently broken and the ground ahead erupts skyward. The Germans are shelling their route to safety. The men make it to the trench and sit tight until the shelling stops. Sensing the lull may not be too long the men proceed along the trench but are presented with the chaotic aftermath of the shelling. Medics rush about tending to injured and dying men. There is not much Stanley and his men can do to assist, so with their route blocked they decide to go back over the top to find an alternative way back to their unit. Now their lives depend upon speed. They clamber up out of the trench and swiftly cover the open ground. Once again the enemy target them with artillery and the ground erupts skyward. Stanley and his comrades instinctively dive into the nearest trench. The trench is deep, offering fantastic protection against the shrapnel, but the floor is two feet deep of mud! Stanley will face an evening of drying off, but at least he is alive.

When daybreaks, it will signal the start of one of the biggest offensives of the whole war and many Brandon lads will be in the thick of it. It will however be one of the darkest days of the war for our lads. Amongst the tens of thousands of casualties will be dozens of Brandon lads wounded, but six of their number will not live to see the sunset. One of them will be William Lingwood, killed on the first day of the Battle of the Somme...