

October 1915

“INSTANTANEOUS.” Synonyms: immediate, instant.

When war was declared last year many of our lads enlisted with the Norfolk Regiment and this month they got their first taste of action. Poor Arthur Kent was merrily cooking dinner when a German artillery shell exploded close by. He is now lying in a Surrey hospital after enduring his third operation to remove shrapnel from his shattered body. Another Brandon lad is in hospital as a consequence of nearly being blown apart. Arthur Field suffered a massive haemorrhage, bleeding through his nose and ears. Apparently they are the lucky ones!

In the first two weeks of this month six Brandon mothers lost a son to the war. Mrs Talbot, who runs the Duke of Wellington pub with her husband, received a letter from a soldier. It seemed her son Walter had engaged the enemy close up and was throwing grenades at them. A German grenade came back at Walter and his team, exploding amongst them, and Walter was killed. Harriet Randall's husband died before the war and then her three sons went off to fight. In her loneliness she suffered a nervous breakdown, and now were are told that one of her sons, Walter, has been killed in Gallipoli. Albert Royal, always conscientious of his mother's anxiety at him going to war, made a point of regularly writing home to her. His last letter was dated 8th October. It now seems a German machine gun took him permanently from his mother. No one deserves to receive news like this, especially the Edwards family. They are still grieving for a daughter who passed away recently in Brandon. So we can't imagine how they felt when they received notification stating their son Bertie, aged nineteen, had been killed in the fighting.

Late last month Bertie Wicks wrote to Charles Warren's mother. Charles was a stretcher-bearer, going out to pick up the wounded and dying. I say, "was", because he will no longer carry out this task. His body was ripped apart by red-hot shrapnel from a German artillery shell. A crumb of comfort was that Bertie stated Charles' death was "instant". It is often the letters written by our lads at the Front that breaks news of a Brandon lad's death, long before the official notification. Those lads do their best to give the recipient any small comfort in an otherwise depressing letter. James Grass, aged nineteen, held down a gardening job in Brandon before the war. His mother is still grieving the loss of another son, Walter, who was killed in action two months ago. I guess it will be of little consolation to her to receive a letter this month from James' friend stating James' death was painless and "instantaneous". Harry Wharf has just written to his parents to tell them of his brother's death. Walter Wharf thought he would be safe from the artillery when he lay down in his dugout, six-foot underground. He was determined the explosions would not claim his life as they had done the other Brandon casualties. Nevertheless he was destined to die. During an artillery barrage the roof of his dugout collapsed and tons of earth came crashing down on him. Harry's letter suggested Walter knew nothing about what had happened and in Harry's words, Walter's death was "instantaneous".

October 1915 has been the deadliest month of the war so far. In our darkest moments we will grasp at any comfort ... *“INSTANTANEOUS.”*