

HEART OF CONFLICT

LOSS

The ultimate sacrifice of those on the Front Lines was death. But that loss was heavily felt on the Home Front many times over for each of the soldier's loved ones. Losing a husband or son or brother was a terrible sacrifice; emotionally, spiritually and financially.

That loss must have been worse still if the soldier was lost abroad in the mud of the no man's land, or, during battles, buried where he fell, often in an unmarked grave. The Royal Army Medical Corps (RAMC) and other soldiers did all they could to save the wounded and the dying, often at great personal risk.

However, it was not always possible to account for everyone in the chaos of war. There were at the end of the conflict 80,000 cases of missing or unaccounted for personnel among British and Commonwealth soldiers. This was known as 'Missing in Action, presumed dead'. However, if a serviceman's family did not want the assumption to be made that their loved one was dead, they were just listed as missing – leaving open the possibility that they were still alive.

Under the Geneva Convention, one side is required by law to inform the other of the prisoners of war they have taken. An estimated 22,000 men who had been listed as missing in action did in fact turn out to be alive after the war. They 'turned up' as Prisoners of War after the war ended.

Some had been lost in the inevitable confusion of Camp administration. Others were made to work behind enemy lines and never documented by the belligerent forces. Many tragically died there as a result of being fired on unintentionally by their own side.

Only 530 of the Cornish soldiers that died are buried at home, and although it was little comfort overall, at least those 'lucky' families could have a funeral and visit the grave, giving some form of closure.

Thankful villages

Only around 50 British communities suffered no fatalities during the war – they are known as the Thankful Villages. Herodsfoot is Cornwall's only Thankful Village. 13 men went off to war and all lucky 13 came home again.

Written by W. Norton/Bridging Arts