

A SHORT HISTORY OF BRANDON AND...

THE ATTACK ON THE SCHOOL

It is a Thursday lunch time and eight-year-old Colin Blanchflower is on his way back to school, having popped home for lunch. However, Colin doesn't know it yet but, this will be no ordinary day, you see this is the 27th of February 1941, placing it in the Second World War. Despite Colin growing up during the war, he has never considered himself to be in any mortal danger. Mind you there have been changes, such as the family having another boy stay with them, an evacuee from London, who lives with Colin because the Government believe Brandon to be a safe haven for children. An event today will rock that confidence.

During that Thursday lunch time the air raid siren had gone off, but the 'All Clear', to signal the end of the warning, has not yet sounded. It seems two years into the war Brandon has become somewhat blasé about air raid warnings because they rarely seem to amount to anything. People tend not to go into shelters but instead continue to go about their business, so Colin not waiting for the 'All Clear' is nothing out of the ordinary. Before Colin and his evacuee friend resume lessons they must first drop off a satchel with Colin's music teacher, who lives at the school looking out onto Market Hill. Colin has a music lesson after school and doesn't want to carry the satchel around school all day until then.

As the two boys approach the front door of the music teacher's home, Colin glimpses an aircraft flying low toward them. A split second later he hears the sound of a machine gun rattling out bullets and sees to his left a line of women workers run for cover, just seconds earlier they had been queueing to get into the fur factory. Colin grabs the evacuee and both fall to the ground at the foot of the music teacher's door. Colin can hear the aircraft still shooting as it passes over the school and heads out of town. The two boys remain lying in the doorway until Colin's father arrives on his bicycle to escort them back to the safety of their home. Colin does not return to school that day and misses his music lesson. In fact, most of the school children are picked up by their shocked parents and get the afternoon off.

It transpires the aircraft was a German Dornier 17, a "flying pencil", aptly named because of its slim shape. It came into town down the Thetford Road and sprayed bullets at the women and the school while children played outside. Thankfully no one was shot, although one of the women was hit by a stone which had been struck by a bullet. A few bullets pierced the roof of the school building.

In that year of 1941, many bombs were dropped on and around Brandon, causing damage to dozens of properties. In those attacks, like Colin, the people of Brandon would count themselves lucky that no one was killed. Mind you, one lad, going to sleep in his bedroom on Thetford Road, was metres from losing his life.

*Based on research by Darren Norton.