In memoria…they sacrificed for us





Remembering them…

No words can convey the pain felt with the loss of a loved one, as painful even if lost in battle. The pain never stops completely, it only diminishes with time, fading ever so slowly but nevertheless, remaining.

Many served, some returned, others did not. We remember them.

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Lt. Col. *Sam Sharpe*, one of our earliest victims of *PTSD*

[The material about Lt. Col. Sam Sharpe is based on a visit to the Town of Uxbridge and seeing the commemorative material and war memorials the town has on its streets and sidewalks.]





Sam Sharpe, an average young man, was born and raised in the Uxbridge area, just north of Toronto, the population of which was barely more than 2000 residents at beginning of the 1900s. When Sam was 16, impassioned by his patriotism and loyalty to Canada, he joined the 34th Ontario Regiment, a local militia infantry unit.

Sam did well academically. A university attendee and a graduate of Osgoode Hall Law School, he was a barrister and solicitor in Uxbridge, a rising star among the professionals of the community. He was an elder in the Methodist Church, a Master in the Masonic Lodge. He was elected to the House of Commons as a Conservative Party member in 1908. He was re-elected in 1911 and was a rising member, one point considered for the cabinet ministry of Minister of Militia and Defense. In short, he was a well-respected and well-known professional in the Uxbridge community.

When WWI broke out, Sam had already served in the local militia for many years. It was inevitable that he would enlist. He was commissioned decades before the war started and rose to rank of major and second-in-command in the 34th regiment by the time the

war started.

The news of the war's outbreak moved Sam to more than just serve. He was determined to recruit as many young men from the region as possible to serve in the Canadian military. He recruited relatives, friends, every able-bodied person he could find. He was very successful in the endeavour enlisting over 1000 young recruits from a population of just 2000 residents.

In 1916, his battalion sailed from Halifax on the RMS *Olympic* (sister ship of the ill-fated *Titanic*) a rather ominous omen. The battalion was deployed to France in early 1917.

The first engagement for the battalion came in April when they manned the front-line trenches at Vimy Ridge. Casualty numbers were low but fatal for Sam. He lost his closest friend, Lieutenant Tom Hutchinson, a loss which affected him very badly and began the erosion of his mental well-being.

In the summer of 1917, the battalion was redeployed to the Western Front. Sam lost his best friend at Vimy Ridge but in 1917, the incredible losses suffered by his battalion would destroy him emotionally. Passchendaele was the last straw. Hundreds of his young recruits were killed. As ranking officer, his duty was to write letters home to inform the soldiers' families of their loss. Each letter tore another layer from Sam's psyche.





The warfare impacted every soldier to various degrees. Many suffered shell shock from the constant barrage of the artillery. Sam suffered much more than his fellow soldiers, probably because of his letter writing duties. Eventually, he wrote more than a 1000 letters. Dear Mary,..., Dear Helen,...Dear Joan,...Dear Zoe,...it was a treadmill of agony and sorrow that devastated him emotionally.

His first breakdown came in early 1918. As his military career rose, he received the Distinguished Service Order in January 1918, but his emotional well-being disintegrated. 'Shell shock,' the name given to post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) at the time, was not viewed as

an illness then. Rather, soldiers suffering the illness at the time were labeled as cowards. Being labeled a coward was too much for Sam's psyche to bear and it marked the beginning of the end for him. He had devoted half of his life to Canadian military service. He fought at Vimy. He fought at Passchendaele. He had recruited more than 1000 young people, all killed. He lost his best friend. He lost almost all the young men he had recruited. Each letter he wrote ripped away another layer from his unstable emotions.

First, he was admitted to the Canadian Convalescence Hospital in Buxton, but his condition declined. He was invalided to the Royal Victoria Hospital in Montreal. The damage of his front-line service, the loss of his best friend, Tom, the impact of the loss of over 1000 recruits was too much to bear. The toll was too much. On May 25, 1918, he jumped to his death through a fourth-floor hospital window to the pavement below. He was 41 years old.