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Lieutenant-Colonel Samuel Sharpe, a former Uxbridge lawyer and MP, will be recognized with a sculpture that will go to centre block at Parliament Hill to recognize him as a sitting politician who died in war. The Uxbridge library will unveil the sculpture by Tyler Briley, below, on March 10. **See page 7**

HONOURING UXBRIDGE'S FORGOTTEN WAR HERO



Photo by Peter Redman

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Uxbridge library unveiling a sculpture of First World War veteran Lt.-Col. Sam Sharpe

Sculpture will go to centre block at Parliament Hill to recognize sitting MP who died in war

Shane MacDonald

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UXBRIDGE -- Lieutenant-Colonel Samuel Sharpe will finally be recognized as an MP who died due to war injuries.

To commemorate Lt.-Col. Sharpe and his contributions during the war, the Government of Canada asked Tyler Briley, a Port Perry artist, to create a sculpture of the man which will eventually sit in the centre block of Parliament Hill.

"I just found doing the whole thing was an emotional experience," said Mr. Briley. "I felt a real connection to the man."

The story of Lt.-Col. Sharpe is a tragic one. A lawyer from Uxbridge who was first elected to the House of Commons in 1908, he used his influence as an MP to raise the 116th Battalion in Ontario County or what is now Durham Region. He went from hamlet to hamlet recruiting men he knew to join the war effort. The 116th Battalion went on to fight in Vimy Ridge, Passchendaele, and Avion, staying together as a unit all the while.

In 1917 Lt.-Col. Sharpe was re-elected to the House of Commons, the only MP to do so while fighting in Europe, but he never returned home the same. After watching his battalion get decimated he was hospitalized with psychological issues. Once back in Canada he was treated for nervous shock in Montreal, feeling unable to go home to Uxbridge and face the families of those who were lost, Lt.-Col. Sharpe died by suicide.

"He was essentially written out of history because of the way he died," said Erin O'Toole, the MP for Durham who helped with the push to acknowledge the lieutenant-colonel. "I made it my mission to talk about the Sam Sharpe legacy and use the Sam Sharpe story to talk about mental injuries from service."

MP O'Toole notes that while Lt.-Col. Sharpe was forgotten in Ottawa, people in Uxbridge kept his story alive, people like Ted Barris, a local author.

"We believe the man deserves more recognition and credit," Mr. Barris said. "He



UXBRIDGE -- Port Perry artist Tyler Briley, right and on front page, inspected his bronze sculpture of Lt.-Col. Samuel Sharpe at the foundry. Mr. Briley created the relief of Lt.-Col. Sam Sharpe, an Uxbridge lawyer and MP who became so deeply affected by the loss of lives he witnessed during the First World War that he died by suicide after his return to Canada. The work, commissioned by the Government of Canada in recognition of the effects of PTSD on military personnel, is destined for the Parliament Buildings in Ottawa, but can be seen for the next few weeks at the Uxbridge library.

“ It’s a century late but what a wonderful legacy it is. The legacy now is we are talking about mental illnesses, we are helping people who come forward. We’re showing veterans and first responders a lot has changed since Sam Sharpe.

-- Durham MP Erin O'Toole

represents the trauma of thousands of his time and since.”

The trauma, or nervous shock Lt.-Col. Sharpe was treated for would likely be called post traumatic stress disorder if he were diagnosed today, something Mr. Briley, the sculptor, says he can identify with.

"I was a firefighter. I spent most of my time on a rescue truck," he said. "I saw some pretty horrific stuff. It gets to you."

While he was never diagnosed with PTSD himself, Mr. Briley says he understands what it can be like.

"I've been through all of those things," Mr. Briley said. "While I was working on the sculpture I had some emotional moments."

Lt.-Col. Sharpe's acknowledgement can also be seen as a changing attitude and acknowledgment of the effects PTSD has

on past, present and future veterans.

"I think it is long overdue, these guys have suffered in silence far too long," Mr. Briley said.

Mr. Barris, who will be attending the unveiling of the sculpture, says it may help with awareness of PTSD, but says it is an accumulative thing that won't happen overnight.

"There's more that has to be done and that's why we've taken this up," he said.

For MP O'Toole, the sculpture represents the righting of a wrong and the recognition of an important legacy.

"It's a century late but what a wonderful legacy it is," he said. "The legacy now is we are talking about mental illnesses, we are helping people who come forward.

"We're showing veterans and first

responders a lot has changed since Sam Sharpe who felt he had no help or support. There is treatment now, you're not alone."

The official unveiling of the sculpture is 7 p.m. at the Uxbridge Public Library, 9 Toronto St. S., on March 10. The public is invited to attend.

It's not known when the sculpture will be moved to Ottawa.

HOW THIS IMPACTS YOU:

- According to Veterans Affairs Canada, PTSD is a psychological response to the experience of intense traumatic events, particularly those that threaten life
- PTSD has been known to exist for a long time. It's been called shell shock, war neurosis, and combat fatigue. In 1980 it became known as post traumatic stress disorder
- The Government of Ontario is looking to pass the Supporting First Responders With PTSD Act, which will make it easier for first responders to get the help they need
- In Canada, it is estimated that up to 10 per cent of war zone veterans will go on to experience PTSD.

Source: veterans.gc.ca and Government of Ontario