

We Remember

Among the first wave of the brave 5000 Canadians who landed on the shores of Dieppe in August 1942 was John Counsell of the Royal Hamilton Light Infantry. Two hours into the six-hour battle he was shot and suffered a near fatal paralyzing injury. He would be awarded the Military Cross for his example of leadership and actions of valour that August day.

Counsell would confess to thinking his life was over but instead he was at the beginning of an incredible life of service in support of his fellow Veterans and citizens with spinal cord injury.

Counsell would be sent to Basingstoke in England. There he would be in the care of fellow Canadian Dr. Harry Botterell who for several years had been advancing new treatment techniques and planting the seeds of a revolution in the medical community's fatalistic attitude towards people with spinal cord injury.

Dr. Botterell was certain that the dynamic Counsell could be the leader needed to blaze a path for a new level of care for the Veterans with spinal cord injury that would inevitably follow him.

Counsell would return to Canada and placed in the care of Dr. William Cone who would encourage him to improve his strength and embrace self-care. He would meet and be inspired by Jimmy Darou, a former jockey, who was delivering the benefits of peer support volunteering before it had a name.

Returning to Ontario he was fortunate to be in a position to create a network of care for himself that few could afford. Public healthcare was still nearly two decades away.

He would import one of the first folding wheelchairs and it would quickly become the key to his mobility and vitality. He quickly recognized that, though he could afford a wheelchair, many of his fellow Veterans could not so he fought for disabled Veterans to be provided with a wheelchair.



Visiting his fellow Veterans at Christie Street Military Hospital and seeing the conditions they lived under, he would reflect on Dr. Botterell's vision for their care. Philanthropist L.M. Wood encouraged Counsell in the pursuit of that vision and helped get the government on board. Counsell's own recovery was their best argument for change.

Lyndhurst would be viewed on D-Day and purchased January 1, 1945. The Canadian Paraplegic Association (CPA, the fore parent of Spinal Cord Injury Ontario) would be born just 15 days later.

All of the original 7 charter members of the CPA were Veterans of World War 2 with spinal cord injury. They would be supported in their efforts by fellow Veterans and philanthropists Conn Smythe and E.W. Bickle and countless other men and women who had served their country in war.

Counsell would manage the organization for 15 years before entrusting it to fellow Veteran Ken Langford. For his role in the care of others, Counsell would be awarded Officer of the Order of Canada and Officer of the Order of the British Empire. More importantly, his legacy would be bettering the lives of tens of thousands of people.

There is a unique connection between Veterans, born of a unique shared experience that needs to be lived to be understood. Veterans created an organization rooted in lived experience, equality and community to care for their comrades in arms. We remember these great men and women by carrying on their tradition of equality and community based on lived experience.

Peer support, knowledge exchange, advocacy, equipment for those in need, help in navigating the system, all these efforts were born out of the comradeship of Veterans who then opened what they built to everyone with spinal cord injury.

Your support is needed to carry on their legacy, to carry on the fight for full and fair lives for people with spinal cord injury. COVID-19 has seriously impeded our fundraising income but not our ability to help. There are many people who simply can't afford to give. If you are blessed to be in a position to make a donation, please help uphold the legacy of these great men and women.

Thank you for your kind attention. Please keep well.



Stuart Howe, CEO

You can help uphold their legacy by making a secure donation online at sciontario.org/donate

