

A Story of Sacrifice to Remember



GDLS-C employee's family member shares moving tale.

By Sean Irvine
Lines of Defense Staff



Bill Dowhaniuk always knew Great Uncle Stan fought in the war. Growing up in Windsor, the GDLS-C employee recalls his Uncle Stan Scislowski as a story teller. "He was never shy," Bill says.

As Bill matured into a teenager he began to pay a more attention to Uncle Stan's war stories. "I'd go to the legion in my youth and sure enough there was Uncle Stan telling animated gesture-filled stories about the good times and bad. In fact, he'd often say, 'If they'd cut off my hands over there, I wouldn't be able to speak today!'

Bill would listen to Uncle Stan's stories and wonder why his own Grandfather, Harris, who also fought in the Second World War didn't speak about it. Harris's campaign had begun on D-day, while Stan's war began in Italy. Both men had horror stories to tell, but only

Uncle Stan would speak out.



Bill Dowhaniuk

As Bill grew into his 20's he began to listen intently to Uncle Stan, and was pleased to learn he was planning to write a book about his war experiences. That book, *Not All of us Were Brave* was released in 1997. In it, Uncle Stan takes about the fear and reservations of young men sent into battle unprepared for the horrors they would face. Uncle Stan includes his own story which saw him follow a path through Italy before a battle injury sent him home.

The book turned Uncle Stan into a moderate celebrity; so much so he was occasionally asked to speak at public events. Prior to one of those engagements, he sent Bill a copy of his speech. This time, Uncle Stan wouldn't be talking about his own experiences, but rather, those of a fallen comrade. It focuses on the valour and sacrifice of Corporal Freddie Lytwyn, a Windsor boy of just 17.

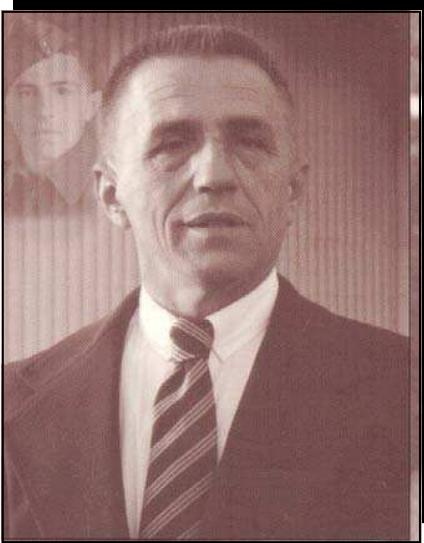
Below is the unedited speech Stan Scislowski gave to a service club just a few years ago. It's not difficult to visualize Freddie's path, through Stan's words.

A Fighting Perth Remembers

The night was black as pitch, no moon, no stars, no flash of

artillery fire to light the way for the Canadian infantry moving forward to the start-line of their next attack.

The night was unusually quiet, as though both armies facing each other in the flatlands of the North Italian plains had gone to bed early. The only sound came from the scuffle of the infantrymen's boots on gravel as they worked their way forward. To a man, as always, they fervently hoped that the advance would be a 'walkover', but it was not to be. The enemy had not gone away, and they had not gone to bed early. Except for those momentarily relieved of weapons post duty, the enemy was very much awake and alert. They were in positions all through the area with their weapons trained at the single point where they were sure the Canadian attack would come in on them, and that was the roadway crossing the Fosso Munio stream.



Stan Scislowski in the 1970s. (Inset: As he appeared during the Second World War)

In the lead section of the lead platoon of the Perth Regiment from Stratford, Ontario spearheading the attack was a 17 year old Windsor lad. Actually, too young to have been inducted into the army, Lance Corporal Freddie Lytwyn had to have lied about his age to get in the army. But he was a veteran now, a veteran of several hard-fought battles as he marched on towards yet another battle, this one only five days before Christmas, hoping, as all men do when going into battle that it would be an easy affair and that he would come out of it okay.

Undetected thus far as they approached the start-line at the roadway crossing of the insignificant narrow watercourse, they entered a roadside drainage ditch, and with stealth made good time on the way to their first objective. They strained their eyes peering into the black fields around them to catch signs of enemy presence to evade them if they could, or to throw fire at them if that had to be. The immediate danger, however, was not in the open fields to their left, nor was it in the impenetrable darkness on their right. It was straight ahead along the line of the ditch. An enemy machine-gun crew hidden behind a stone culvert waited for them, their weapon pointing down the line of that ditch. Their weapon, an MG 42 rated at 1200 rounds per minute, almost twice as fast as the Bren, could, in the narrow confines of the ditch do considerable slaughter. There was no way the man behind the gun could miss the unsuspecting approaching platoon.

At 25 yards range the enemy Fusilier squeezed the trigger? The gun ripping off a long burst. 400 steel jacketed slugs slammed into the bodies of the lead two sections. Twelve men died instantly, their bodies literally torn apart in the slash of bullets. Back along the column, others a little slower to react to the 'ripping canvas' sound of the gun, threw themselves onto the slick sides of the ditch, but they delayed only by seconds their own deaths. Somewhere in that pile of torn bodies was that of the 17 year old Windsor lad. He was too young to have to die in battle. He was too young to die at any time.

He, like so many countless others of our generation had been denied by the cruel fates of war to reach manhood, to love, to marry, to raise a family, to enjoy all those things that we as survivors have taken for granted. And so, in eternal thankfulness to God that somehow we were spared a similar fate and allowed to live out our lives as He had

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Stan Scislowski on a recent visit to Italy.

intended, it is only fit and proper that on Remembrance Day we should pause and pay tribute to their supreme sacrifice.

I've taken the liberty of describing the last moments in the life of one inordinately young Canadian who represents the hundred thousand and more other Canadians who laid down their lives in War. I have done this for a reason, that reason being that it is much easier to focus one's thoughts onto one individual than onto a faceless multitude. In remembering one... you remember all.

Stan Scislowski

Bill Dowhaniuk would later learn Uncle Stan had told this story at least once before he gave this speech. When he returned from the war, Uncle Stan bumped into the Corporal Lytwyn's sister. On a dance floor she told Stan her family was hopeful "the reports might be wrong, Freddie might yet come home." Uncle

Stan was sadly the one who had to tell her Freddie wasn't one of the lucky ones.

In later life Uncle Stan would return to Italy to retrace his own steps and to visit Freddie Lytwyn's grave; often, Bill estimates, asking himself why he made it and Freddie didn't.

Today, Great Uncle Stan resides in a Windsor retirement home. Bill keeps in frequent contact.

Thank you, Stan, for sharing Corporal Lytwyn's story with *Lines of Defense*.

I'm certain our readers thank you and Corporal Lytwyn for your service and sacrifice to our nation.

By the way your nephew Bill proudly calls you a "hero."



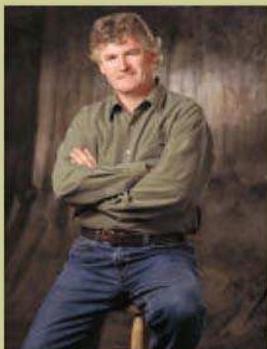
The gravestone of Corporal Freddie Lytwyn.

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