

TO SERVE



AND PROTECT

Craig Tourangeau's Journey from the Military to Policing

As Interviewed by Jeff Tiessen

June 9, 1994. A date that left an indelible mark on Craig Tourangeau's mind and body. Twenty-odd years later he remembers every detail of that spring morning in Nanaimo like it was just yesterday. Soldiers of course are trained to acutely attend to every nuance around them. But this is different.

With great clarity Tourangeau, now 50, recalls the weather that morning, what he had for breakfast – eggs, sausage and hashbrowns – and the exact time of day that he joined the ranks of Canada's amputee citizenry. He was serving in the military's Special Forces Unit, engaged in a training exercise with the RCMP. His unit was deployed to British Columbia to support Victoria's Commonwealth Games with a higher level of security. This was not combat. There was no safety threat. His team was simply going through their daily paces to stay sharp and on their game, a customary cog of military life.

The military had interested Tourangeau as far back as he can remember. He was intent on making a career out of serving his country.

He joined the Cameron Highlanders of Ottawa's Militia Unit as a seventeen-year-old. Over the next decade he progressed through various units and assignments working his way up the chain of command. Sergeant Tourangeau left the military at age 29, a career shortened by injury and frustration. Before his injury he was scheduled to go into the training cadre, instructing military recruits and candidates. Ironically, what Tourangeau thought would be a natural transition after his injury didn't play out that way. One year later, by his own accord, he was looking for a job.

JUNE 9, 1994. Tourangeau's 12 years in the military included a tour of duty in Cyprus and emersion in the Yugoslavia era of the 1990s. As precarious as combat and peacekeeping missions can be, soldiers are well aware that training exercises are not exempt from the risk of injury as well. That June morning in Nanaimo confirmed it. Tourangeau pulled the pin on a diversion device, a stun grenade, designed to explode quickly with a flash of blinding light to immobilize the enemy and provide time to contain them in whichever way the situation dictates. "The device had a faulty fuse," explains Tourangeau. "When I pulled the pin it went off instantly in my hand. I lost

all of my fingers and most of my left hand. I was immediately airlifted to the military hospital in Victoria. My hand was amputated through the wrist later that day."

After a transfer to the Military Hospital in Ottawa for recovery and then the Royal Ottawa Hospital for rehabilitation, three months in all, Tourangeau was cleared for a return to military duty. "Back then," he tells, "the military's approach to pain management was atrocious. There really wasn't such a thing. It was a 'carry-on' mentality, a culture of 'everything is good.' Walking out the hospital door the doctor asked if I was 'good to go?' 'Yep,' I said. 'See ya'."

Tourangeau would now tour his own country, testing candidates, but quickly became frustrated with his regiment. "To them I was a 'handicapped' soldier, an attitude that came with a push to retire or release me and that didn't sit well with me," he divulges. "I left the military to work as a Use of Force Instructor at the Ontario Police College in Aylmer, teaching recruits baton and pepper spray work, hand cuffing, kicking and punching to protect yourself. I was hired on the spot. That I was an amputee didn't matter."

One year later Tourangeau was sworn in as a Constable with the Toronto Police Service.



“I proved myself very quickly to my peers and during my four years on the road I was never challenged. In fact, most didn’t even notice that I wore a hook.”

JUNE 9, 1994. Seven months after his injury Tourangeau was fitted with his first prosthesis and was back on the military range, qualifying for his return with all of his weapons. “My mindset was ‘It’s only a hand – let’s go – just soldier on. I was Airborne. I am Special Forces’.” The Type A personality soldier that he was, brashly brushed his amputation aside. “I wanted back on the team operations. There have been soldiers in the U.S. who have returned to Afghanistan with prosthetic limbs. I know I could’ve done that too,” Tourangeau asserts. And then, with a pause, acknowledges, “I didn’t deal with it (injury) very well. Actually I didn’t deal with it at all.”

Ten years later Tourangeau was diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). When asked how PTSD affected him he curtly replied, “Well, I have three ex-wives to show for it. Depression. Bad dreams.” He adds, “I was never the ‘why me’ type of guy. I’ve always pushed forward, but suppressed everything along the

way. Military guys generally don’t like talking to doctors. I learned years later that that is not the right thing to do.” Today Tourangeau willingly manages his PTSD with the help of a psychologist.

When applying for the Toronto Police Services job, Tourangeau knew there might potentially be issues but that he “could do the job with one hand tied behind his back.” He graduated as the top recruit in the province for his intake. “Another important aspect of police work is intellectual,” he shares. “Communicating, influencing, and de-escalating situations are among my strengths as well.”

Tourangeau was right. There would be an issue. But never one challenge in the field, not with other officers, nor with the public – he spent six years in a regular division, in the car and on the street, and two years undercover. He now works in the K-9 unit with his two dogs: Swinger, his bomb dog, and

Fred, his patrol dog trained for tracking criminals and missing persons.

The matter was attitudinal. There were reservations about hiring him. “The department questioned why they were hiring an officer with a disability. I passed everything with flying colours, was valedictorian, but they were not going to give me my firearms qualification.” Never asking for any accommodation, there was no reasonable justification for withholding him. All constables start with a probation period... and Tourangeau received glowing recommendations throughout that process. “I proved myself very quickly to my peers and during my four years on the road I was never challenged,” he maintains. “In fact, most didn’t even notice that I wore a hook.”

In keeping with obscurity, Tourangeau is quick to relate an amusing anecdote about a newly-transferred Sergeant to his unit who admitted that for two weeks he couldn’t understand why every time he saw Tourangeau walking around the station he was



MARCH to the TOP

In 2012, the True Patriot Love Foundation, a Toronto-based organization, recruited 10 wounded soldiers with unique stories to embark on an expedition to Nepal – to climb to an Everest base camp and summit Island Peak – as a fundraising and awareness project. Craig Tourangeau was one of those soldiers.

Commissioned by the CBC, *March to the Top* is a compelling and emotional documentary that highlights the challenges faced by these 10 Canadian vets as they struggled to the 20,305 ft.-high summit of Island Peak, a mountain near Everest in the Himalayas. *March to the Top* also gives Canadians a look into the lives of these soldiers through visits to their homes and with families across Canada to discover why they joined the armed forces, how they sustained their injuries, what their present lives are like and what their hopes are for the future. *March to the Top* is not about the experiences of these soldiers while serving, but about what they're doing next in their lives and what they need to do to get there.

"By participating in the expedition I hoped to show that injured veterans can accomplish great goals in life despite serious physical injuries through perseverance," said Tourangeau. "I believe that by having a strong mindset and internal strength you can achieve anything that you try. I believe this has been key to my success in what I have achieved since my injury."



always carrying handcuffs in one hand. "He never made the distinction between my silver hook and silver handcuffs," he laughs.

Tourangeau wears a conventional hook on the job. Off the job he is a new recruit of sorts once again, enjoying the learning curve associated with his i-Limb Quantum hand from Touch Bionics, arguably the most versatile and advanced prosthetic hand available today. He loves to cook. He especially loves the food preparation part of it all. He typically wouldn't wear his hook in the kitchen and just compensated one-handed... "with the help of the Slap Chop and a lot of other electric gadgets of course," he chuckles.

But his Quantum, with five moveable fingers and different operating modes, is programmed for specific grips revolved around cooking. "I can change grips with a simple gesture within my socket," Tourangeau

explains. "One, for example, is set for opening little packets of sugar, or other fine movements like doing up your zipper or tying your shoelaces. Another holds a jar. And you can program it for home or work or recreation, and set it to different grip settings for that environment. For work, maybe for a computer mouse or holding a pen. Or holding a fishing rod, but I wouldn't want to fall out of the boat with it," he smiles. "It can take light dish work, but not a plunge into that much water."

"And it goes further. I can open up the i-Limb application on my phone, which is synchronized to my hand through Bluetooth, and I have instant access to 24 new grips with the tap of a button on the app screen... grips like a handshake or a one-finger-trigger for a bottle of Windex. Or you can even add customized gestures like shooting the finger," he admits with a smirk. "I'm riding my motorcycle with

“... there are other sacrifices that come with a military career as well. You miss births, deaths, birthdays and anniversaries. You miss your family, graduations, your kid’s first tooth falling out. It hurts but you fall back to why you signed up... to serve your country.”

the i-Limb now too,” adds Tourangeau. “I’ve always used my conventional hook as the clutch hand. Riding a motorcycle fast is easy, especially a big, fully-dressed touring bike like my Harley, but it’s the slow stuff like turning, stopping and backing up that’s more difficult because it’s a lot of clutch work. It’s insane how strong this hand is in terms of grip strength – it’s like having my hand again. And much more natural than the hook.”

JUNE 9, 1994. “When I was in the military hospital in Ottawa, there was a Navy diver across the hall from me. He was in his early 20s. He and his dive buddy were doing maintenance on a ship when he lost his hand when it got pinched and essentially torn off while entering the water off the ship. So me, with my couple of months of experience being one-handed went over to talk to him every day. I was kind of mentoring him with our ‘soldier on’ mentality. But I was far from ready to be in a position of helping anyone.”

Tourangeau confesses that the kind of advice that he’d give him today would be much different. “I would definitely say, first and foremost, get the treatment you need. There should be no shame in that. Resist the pressure to overlook your injury. Rely on your family and especially your peers.” Choking back his emotions Tourangeau adds: “We lose way too many vets who are suffering from PTSD. ‘Things change and you need to adapt’ as Clint Eastwood says in Heartbreak Ridge.”




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JUNE 9, 1994. Sacrifice. A word civilians use to honour and understand what soldiers do for our country and the freedoms that we enjoy. For soldiers it is that too, and something more. "It certainly is about the rights and freedoms that we have that were paid for by human lives. But there are other sacrifices that come with a military career as well," emphasizes Tourangeau. "You miss births, deaths, birthdays and anniversaries. You miss your family, graduations, your kid's first tooth falling out. It hurts but you fall back to why you signed up... to serve your country. It's part of being a great Canadian in my opinion. I'm not saying that people who don't serve in the military are not great Canadians. But everyone who has served is."

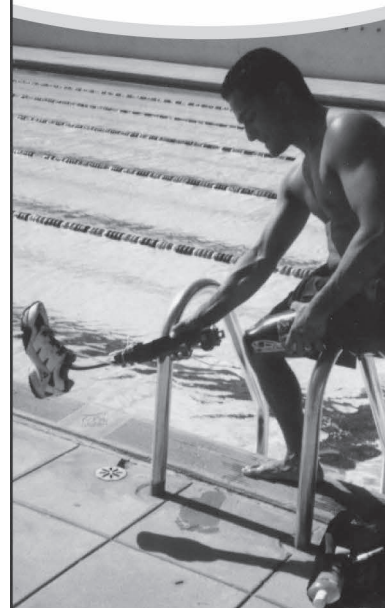
Tourangeau is quick to point out how humbling it is to him and many other servicemen and women to be randomly thanked by civilians for their service. "It's happening much more in recent years, especially after the war in Afghanistan, where we kicked ass," he notes. "What most in our country may not understand is that the Canadian military is top-notch. In Afghanistan we basically took care of things by ourselves while American soldiers were busy in Iraq at the time. We're not as big as many militaries in the world, but

we're among the toughest. In Afghanistan we proved to the world that we are a modern-day tough army and do what we are asked to do.

In light of that warrior mentality that Tourangeau admittedly subscribes to, it's somewhat ironic that he defaults to a single word as his Achilles Heel... handicapped. "My biggest challenge as an amputee is getting past that word," he reveals. "Yes, I am an amputee, but don't call me 'handicapped' because I am not handicapped. Just look at what I've done since I became an amputee. I don't really care how people look at me or perceive me – I do presentations as part of my police work in schools and the first thing kids ask about is my hook. That doesn't bother me. It's okay for kids to ask those questions, but it's the stereotypes and preconceived notions held by some adults that I struggle with."

JUNE 9, 1994. "I lost my left hand as a soldier. But I am still a productive member of society. I'm committed to educating youth about that. And in fact, kids see my prosthetic hand and what I can do with it, particularly my i-Limb, as pretty cool and amazing."

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