

PEOPLE PROFILE Sergeant Thomas George Prince MM SS

Canada's most decorated Aboriginal war hero



FACT FILE

D.O.B 15 October 1915
P.O.B Manitoba
D.O.D 25 November 1977
Tribe Ojibwa
Years of Service 1939-1954
Rank Sergeant
Unit Royal Canadian Engineers
 1st Canadian Parachute Battalion
 1st Special Service Force Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry (2PPCLI)
Engagements
 World War II
 France
 Italy
 Korean War
 Battle of Kapyong
Awards Military Medal (MM) (UK)
 Silver Star (USA)
 6 Service Medals for WWII
 4 Service Medals for Korea
Other Work
 Business owner
 Chairman of Manitoba Indian Association
 Lumberjack

Tommy Prince was born in a canvas tent. He was the great-great-grandson of the famous Chief Peguis, an 18th century Saulteaux chief.

Growing up on the Brokenhead reserve with his 10 brothers and sisters, 80 kilometres north of Winnipeg he learnt from his father, hunting skills that were to become a key part of his life. In his teens, he joined the Army cadets and honed his shooting skills, he could put five bullets through a target the size of a playing card at 100 metres.

At the start of the war, he volunteered and served with the Royal Canadian Engineers. In 1940 he volunteered for paratrooper service, the training was very difficult. Prince was one of nine out of a hundred to graduate from the parachute school in Manchester, England.

What distinguished him from the other trainees was his natural instinct for 'ground'. This meant that when he landed, he was able to crawl forward on his stomach with incredible speed and agility. He also knew instinctively how to conceal himself from view using small indents in an otherwise flat field and of course he was a crack shot with a rifle.

By 1942 he returned to Canada and had been promoted to the rank of Sergeant in the 1st Canadian Parachute Battalion. His battalion merged with United States Special Force, which was to become the elite 1st Special Service Force (see page 104). Prince was made a reconnaissance sergeant because of his unique hunting and field abilities.

On 8 February 1944 Sergeant Prince performed his most daring and dangerous feat in Anzio, Italy. His unit had been fighting for 90 days without relief on the frontlines. He went alone to an abandoned farmhouse in enemy territory and used it as an observation post. Prince ran a radio cable from the allied position to the farmhouse.

From here he was able to tell his colleagues the exact location of enemy troops so they could destroy them. However the communication line was suddenly cut. Immediately and without thinking of his safety, Prince found some farmer's clothes that had been left behind and changed into them. At the time, many Italian farmers still stayed in their farms even though there were battles taking place all around them.

Sergeant Prince then pretended to be an angry

"As soon as I put on my uniform I felt a better man"



farmer, he went out into the field, shaking his fists shouting at the enemy and then at the allies. Then he went to work with a hoe in the field in plain view of the enemy, when in fact, he was secretly following the radio cable and looking for the break. When he found it, while pretending to tie his shoelace, he fastened the cable back together. He continued working in the field before going back to the farmhouse where he continued to transmit vital information to the allies.

Once the enemy withdrew, Prince left his post and returned to his commanding officer.

For his outstanding bravery and daring he was presented with a British Military Medal and an American Silver Star by King George VI at Buckingham Palace. After the war he returned to Canada and was honourably discharged from the armed forces in June 1945.

His return to civilian proved difficult at first, he was unable to find meaningful work where he could use his skills, so he worked as a lumberjack. However as a veteran he was able to get some government assistance and set up his own successful cleaning business. In 1946 he was elected chairman of the Manitoba Indian Association. He lobbied the government for equal rights for his people, improved housing and education and access to traditional lands.

In 1950 Prince returned to the Army to fight in the Korean War. He served on the frontline alongside Captain Reg Saunders and the Royal 3rd Australian Regiment (see page 18). Both Saunders and Prince's regiments were awarded the United States Presidential Unit Citation for distinguished service in Kapyong.

Sergeant Prince was one of 59 Canadians awarded the US Silver Star and one of three awarded the Military Medal.

Prince returned to Canada when the war ended and was honourably discharged a year later in 1954 due to ill health. A combination of his poor health, and being unable to use his wartime skills in civilian life meant he could only get menial jobs. He drank heavily, had little money and eventually separated from his wife and five children. Sadly Sergeant Prince had to sell his prized medals to support himself.

He died in November 1977 at the age of 62. In 1997, after a nationwide fundraising campaign, Prince's family were able to buy back all of his medals at an auction for \$75,000.

TRIBUTES

A street, a school, an army barracks and drill hall have been named after him. Prince was also portrayed in the 1968 film "Devil's Brigade", as the character 'Chief'

Project: For your eyes only



Cover Story.

You are a journalist from the Seagate Times newspaper. You are helping the Prince family to raise money to buy back Sgt Prince's medals.

Write an article in the newspaper about Sgt Prince's achievements to help the fundraising campaign.

