

2007

Tommy Prince: Warrior

McKenzie Porter

P. Whitney Lackenbauer
St. Jerome's University

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholars.wlu.ca/cmh>



Part of the [Military History Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Porter, McKenzie and Lackenbauer, P. Whitney "Tommy Prince: Warrior." *Canadian Military History* 16, 2 (2007)

This Feature is brought to you for free and open access by Scholars Commons @ Laurier. It has been accepted for inclusion in *Canadian Military History* by an authorized editor of Scholars Commons @ Laurier. For more information, please contact scholarscommons@wlu.ca.

Tommy Prince Warrior

McKenzie Porter
with an introduction by P. Whitney Lackenbauer

Over the last decade, there has been a flurry of interest in Aboriginal men and women who served in the world wars and Korea. No one is more famous than Sergeant Thomas George Prince, MM (1915-77), one of the most decorated non-commissioned officers in Canadian military history. Yet he remains, to most Canadians, an unknown figure.

McKenzie Porter's article "Tommy Prince: Warrior" appeared in Maclean's magazine in 1952, after Prince returned from his first tour of duty in Korea. It recounts Prince's best known exploits, and offers the best glimpse into the personality of this remarkable individual whose daring and drive on the battlefield was matched by a fierce pride to try "to recover the long-lost glory of his race." The reprinting of this article in Canadian Military History will help to ensure that Prince's story is better known.

Tommy Prince was born into a large family on the Brokenhead Band (formerly St Peter's reserve), north of Winnipeg, Manitoba, in 1915. A descendant of Chief Peguis, his relatives had served the Crown during the Red River uprisings, as Nile River Voyageurs, and during the First World War. One of 11 children, he went to residential school at age 5 and like many Native children joined the cadets. He became an excellent marksman, and as a teenager, he had great aspirations to be a lawyer. Instead, in the midst of Depression, he quit school at age sixteen and worked as a lumberjack and at other odd jobs.¹

In 1940, at the age of 24, Prince enlisted in the army. He began his military career as a sapper with the Royal Canadian Engineers then, bored with home guard duties in England, volunteered as a paratrooper in 1942 and was promoted to corporal. He trained with the 1st Canadian Special Service Force or "Devil's Brigade" back in North America, was promoted to sergeant, and went on to distinguish himself in battle. Near Littoria, Italy in early February 1944, Prince was ordered to maintain surveillance at an abandoned farmhouse approximately 200 metres from the enemy lines. Connected to his battalion by some 1400 metres of telephone wire, Prince radioed updates about artillery emplacements. When the communication line was cut by shells during his watch, Prince put on civilian clothes and masqueraded as a farmer hoeing his field. Slowly making his way down the line he fixed the severed lines a number of times and continued to report on the enemy's dispositions. With the information he provided, four German positions were destroyed. "Sergeant's Prince's courage and utter disregard for personal safety were an inspiration to his fellows and a marked credit to his unit," read the citation to the Military Medal he earned for his actions.² The story is recounted more fully in Porter's article.

Six months later, Prince's unit was stationed in southern France. On 1 September, Sergeant Prince led a two-man reconnaissance patrol deep behind enemy lines near L'Escarene. Over rugged, mountainous terrain, they gained



Library and Archives Canada (LAC) PA 142287

“valuable and definite information [about] the enemy’s outpost positions, gun locations and a bivouac area,” before walking back seventy kilometres to file their report. It was a feat of endurance and tenacity – 72 hours without food or sleep – that led to the capture of more than a thousand German soldiers. The citation for Prince’s Silver Star declared, “So accurate was the report rendered by the patrol that Sergeant Prince’s regiment moved forward on 5 September 1944, occupied new heights and successfully wiped out the enemy bivouac [encampment] area....The keen sense of responsibility and devotion to duty displayed by Sergeant Prince is in keeping with the highest traditions of the military service and reflects great credit upon himself and the Armed Forces of the Allied Nations.”³ After the fighting in southern France ended, King George VI summoned Prince to London and awarded him the Silver Star and ribbon on behalf of the President of the United States. There were only 59 Canadians awarded the Silver Star, and only three also wore the Military Medal. Prince was in elite company.

Prince was discharged on 15 June 1945 and returned to Manitoba a war hero. Like many others, however, he found that his life had changed. His father had passed away, and he divorced his wife. When a woman attacked him with a broken bottle at a dance in 1946, leaving him with a facial laceration requiring 64 stitches, he was determined to leave the reserve for good. Even for a veteran with a heroic record, however, finding a job in peacetime proved difficult. He made his living cutting pulp wood, and soon found that he was “just another Indian” once again. After working as a janitor in Winnipeg, he decided to start his own cleaning business and purchased a panel truck and supplies using re-establishment support from the Department of Veterans Affairs.⁴

Prince was now called upon to serve as a voice for his people. “Before you could say ‘Big Chief Sitting Bull,’” one

Sergeant Tommy Prince photographed following the investiture ceremony at Buckingham Palace where he was awarded the Military Medal. 12 February 1945.

over-zealous journalist noted, “this young Chippewa brave was back on the warpath. Only his sniper rifle was replaced by words and writing.”⁵ In early December 1946, the Manitoba Indian Association asked Prince to serve as vice-president and chief spokesman for their organization, believing that his war hero status would provide leverage when he spoke to federal officials. He agreed to represent his people’s interests, motivated by the awareness that Native peoples faced dismal prospects after the war. “On his return from overseas he visited some northern Indian reservations and was appalled by the prevailing conditions,” one editorial explained. “My job is to unite the Indians of Canada so we can be as strong as possible when we go to the House of Commons,” Prince stressed as he prepared the case for better education, sanitation, and agricultural policies for Indians on reserves.⁶ He was convinced that the myth of the simple-minded, backward Indian needed to be shattered. “The changing of this view became an obsession with him,” his biographers observed. “Somehow or other, the prestige of the Indians had to be raised as a first step toward future progress.” Unfortunately, he could not accomplish this with his cleaning business; Prince returned to find that his “friends” had smashed his truck and the rest of his equipment was missing. He went to work as a lumberjack, in a pulp and paper mill, and at a local cement plant.⁷

In early August 1950, when the Canadian Government appealed for volunteers to fill the Canadian Army Special Force (CASF) to serve in the Korean War, Tommy Prince re-enlisted in the army immediately and joined the 2nd Battalion, Princess Patricia’s Canadian Light Infantry (PPCLI). Why did he sign up? “I owed something to my friends who died” in the earlier war, he explained later in life.⁸ Prince’s previous service provided him with important experience, but had also taken its toll physically and patrolling in the rugged Korean terrain caused him great discomfort. His comrades noticed that Prince was exhausted, dragging himself up and down hills “with a wooden staff, plus guts and determination.”⁹ In October 1951, Porter explains, Prince was sent home and he was duly posted to a training position at Camp Borden.

Prince hardly welcomed the transition to a less bellicose role. “He was a misfit,” historian Robert Hepenstall later recorded. Prince was “excellent in battle, but unable to function in any other situation. There was a problem finding him employment within the army. He was not a good parade square man, nor with his limited education was he a good lecturer.” The sergeant was put in charge of stores, but had the nasty habit of insulting young officer cadets when they picked up equipment. He also made enemies in the sergeants’ mess when he heaped scorn on those who had not seen combat overseas.¹⁰ When Porter visited the military camp, he encountered an obviously uncomfortable situation. Young recruits seemed intimidated by Prince’s achievements, and NCOs thought that Prince was “medals mad.” Although he already had “ten ribbons on his chest,” they told the Maclean’s reporter, “more than any other NCO in the Canadian Army, he still wants more.”

What accounts for Prince’s enthusiasm to return to Korea in late 1952? Was it a psychological need to return to the bloody meritocracy of combat? Although a decorated hero, did he feel compelled to prove that he was still a warrior? Prince may not have seen himself as inferior, but he certainly had something to prove. He continued to see himself as a representative of his people, and the only place that he believed he had succeeded in demonstrating his leadership was on the battlefield.

Prince’s zealous approach to combat seemed out of sync with the new realities of the Korean battlefield. By the fall of 1952, it had become a defensive war. While diplomats tried to negotiate an end to the war, the Canadian Army fought “a war of patrols” on the ground.¹¹ It was perilous, but hardly conducive to bold acts of heroism. During fighting at “the Hook” on 18 November, Prince sustained a leg injury from intense shelling but remained in action.¹² Korean war veteran Claude Petit recalled seeing Prince in a dug-out, using his bayonet to pick shrapnel out of his leg. Someone told the sergeant to go back to have his leg examined, but he retorted: “Hell, I don’t have time for that.” As Petit put it, “that’s just the kind of guy he was.”¹³

Platoon commander Robert Peacock told a documentary filmmaker that "Tommy was always pushing, pushing...He had a reputation to maintain and he shouldn't...have been pushed, or allowed to be pushed, into his final [bit] where he literally collapsed.... It was too bad, because, it was a great legend there."¹⁴ The daily grind of occupying front-line positions and mounting patrols took its toll on Canadian soldiers, and proved particularly damaging to Tommy Prince.¹⁵ On Christmas Eve 1952, a fighting patrol led by Prince was ambushed and one of his men was injured. Prince insisted that the patrol was complete, but he had left the unconscious soldier in the field. He was arrested for leaving someone behind and claiming that his patrol was complete. Fortunately, his superiors did not insist on a court martial; in their informal assessment, Prince was clearly suffering from "battle exhaustion." Prince was relegated to an administrative job and spent several weeks in hospital between January and April 1953.¹⁶ Prince did not see combat again.

By the time his Korean War service ended, Prince walked with a limp. He required knee surgery for arthritis and cartilage damage, and could no longer soldier on. In October 1953, he was honourably discharged from the army with a disability pension. Prince returned to civilian life with little hope of securing sustainable employment. Without a uniform, Prince found that society no longer treated him as an equal. Prince found a job at an ice cream factory in Winnipeg soon after his return, but he discovered that some employees refused to work with him simply because he was an "Indian." Obviously, his achievements overseas were not enough to quash racial prejudices. Although the plant manager supported Prince, the former soldier could not stand the humiliation and quit. "It was a bitter lesson to learn, and it changed his personality."¹⁷ Prince's life lacked stability. He and his new common-law wife, Verna Sinclair, had five children after 1953, and they moved the family back and forth between Winnipeg and the Brokenhead Reserve. Haunted by painful wartime memories, he had trouble sleeping, and his arthritic knees got worse. By 1961, he had descended into alcoholism and poverty. He and Verna separated in 1964, and their children were placed in foster homes.¹⁸

Tommy Prince remained fiercely independent. He eked out a meagre existence by working odd jobs in construction and, later, with Winnipeg Help-All. By 1976, he was living out of a suitcase in the Salvation Army's Social Service Centre.¹⁹ The PPCLI always invited him to Remembrance Day ceremonies in Winnipeg and honoured Prince with a special ceremony on the Brokenhead Reserve in August 1975. When it was over, Prince slipped back into obscurity on the rough streets of Winnipeg.²⁰ His children eventually found him and their reunions helped to restore his faith. In the end, he managed to beat alcoholism, but could not conquer his nightmares. Prince disclosed to a local journalist that "his final years were spent reliving the terror of the two wars and every night his bed was wet from the tears and sweat."²¹ Prince never overcame the operational stress injuries he had sustained in wartime. In 1977, at age 62, Tommy Prince died at the Deer Lodge Hospital for Veterans.

In the following article, we hear suggestions that Prince was "medals mad" – despite the ten that he wore on his chest, he wanted more. Unfortunately, Prince's war medals disappeared by the time of his death, possibly pawned or lost in a house fire.²² In 2000, they turned up at an auction in London, Ontario. His family's desire to re-acquire them attracted national media attention. On 10 August, they "won" them back with a staggering bid of \$75,000, backed by pledges from Aboriginal groups, the Royal Canadian Legion, and Veterans Affairs Minister Ron Duhamel.²³ In November 2001, his medals were placed on permanent display at the Manitoba Museum of Man and Nature. The following year, 25 years after his death, the French ambassador to Canada also presented the Prince family with a certificate recognizing the soldier's bravery in France during the Second World War.²⁴ He has been commemorated on a coin, a bronze plaque, three murals, and a stone memorial at the corner of Selkirk Avenue and Sergeant Tommy Prince Street in Winnipeg. A statue honouring Prince sits in a park in Scantterbury, on the Brokenhead Reserve, across from one of Chief Peguis, his great-grandfather.²⁵ He has been the subject of at least one play, and the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba unanimously passed

a 2004 resolution honouring and recognizing Prince "for his contribution and sacrifice to both Canada and to the province of Manitoba."²⁶ He remains the best known Native Canadian soldier of the twentieth century.

Notes

1. Janice Summerby, *Native Soldiers, Foreign Battlefields* (Ottawa: Department of Veterans Affairs, 1993), p.25; D. Bruce Sealey and Peter Van De Vyvere, *Manitobans in Profile: Thomas George Prince* (Winnipeg: Peguis Publishers, 1981).
2. Quoted in Fred Gaffen, *Forgotten Soldiers* (Penticton: Theytus, 1985), p.56.
3. "U.S. Medals Given to 14 Canadians For Gallant Deeds," *Globe and Mail*, 26 February 1945; "Honored," *Winnipeg Free Press*, 2 March 1945; "Scantbury Man Wins U.S. Medal," *Ibid.*, 21 March 1945. A rumour circulated after the war that the French commander also recommended Prince for the *Croix de Guerre*, but the courier was killed en route and the message never reached Charles de Gaulle. This translated into some mistaken newspaper articles suggesting that Prince actually won the French decoration. See, for example, "The Patricias Salute Deeds of Tommy Prince," *Ibid.*, 5 August 1975.
4. Sealey and Van de Vyvere, *Thomas George Prince*. On status Indian veterans' benefits, see R.S. Sheffield, *A Search for Equity: A Study of the Treatment Accorded to First Nations Veterans and Dependents of the Second World War and Korea* (Ottawa: National Round Table on First Nations Veterans' Issues, 2001).
5. "Indians Find Champion in Indian World War Hero," *Winnipeg Tribune*, 7 December 1946.
6. "New Champion of the Indian," *Winnipeg Tribune*, 7 December 1946.
7. Sealey & de Vyvere, *Thomas George Prince*, pp.28-9.
8. "'Recruit' Prince Decorated In '44 Has Another Go," *Winnipeg Free Press*, 16 August 1950; "I owed something to my friends," *Winnipeg Sun*, 28 November 1977. On CASF enlistments, see Brent Byron Watson, *Far Eastern Tour: The Canadian Infantry in Korea, 1950-1953* (Kingston and Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2002), pp.13-14.
9. Robert Hepenstall, *Find the Dragon: The Canadian Army in Korea, 1950-1953* (Edmonton: Four Winds, 1995), p.52.
10. Hepenstall, *Find the Dragon*, 311.
11. R.S. Peacock, *Kim-chi, Asahi and Rum: A Platoon Commander Remembers Korea, 1952-1953* (Toronto: Lugus, 1994), pp.26-27; William Johnston, *A War of Patrols: Canadian Army Operations in Korea* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2003), pp.331-32; David Bercuson, *Blood on the Hills: The Canadian Army in the Korean War* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999), p.211.
12. Summerby, *Native Soldiers*; "Manitoban War Hero Wounded," *Winnipeg Free Press*, 25 November 1952.
13. Petit interview in *Fallen Hero: The Tommy Prince Story*, dir. Audrey Mehler, 45 mins., David Paperny Films Inc., 1999, videocassette.
14. Peacock interview in *Ibid.*
15. Johnston, *War of Patrols*, p.335.
16. For a more thorough discussion of Prince's second Korean tour and post-traumatic stress disorder, see P.W. Lackenbauer, "A Hell of a Warrior': Remembering the Life of Sergeant Thomas George Prince," *Journal of Historical Biography* 1/1 (Autumn 2006).
17. Sealey and De Vyvere, *Thomas George Prince*, p.43.
18. See Lloyd Dohla, "Thomas Prince: Canada's Forgotten Aboriginal War Hero," *First Nations Drum* (Fall 2002). Available online at <http://www.firstnationsdrum.com/Fall2002/HisPrince.htm>.
19. Brian Cole, "Hero condemns 'punks' of today," *Winnipeg Free Press*, 10 November 1976; "I owed something to my friends," *Winnipeg Sun*, 28 November 1977.
20. "Pauper's burial for war hero," PPCLI Museum and Archives clipping file; Brian Cole, "Hero condemns 'punks' of today," 6. The Manitoba Indian Brotherhood also honoured Prince for his contributions in late 1976. "MIB conference opens," *Winnipeg Free Press*, 7 December 1976, p.2.
21. Cole, "Hero condemns 'punks'"; "Pauper's burial for war hero," PPCLI Museum and Archives clipping file.
22. "Lost and found," *The Beaver* (Oct/Nov 2001), p.4.
23. On Prince's medals, see for example "War Hero's Medals Back in Manitoba," *Legion Magazine* (November/December 2001), p.65.
24. From CBC news archives: "Prince medals return to province," 5 November 2001; "War hero's memorial to be unveiled," 2 September 2002; "French government to honour Prince," 22 November 2002.
25. "Coins," *Winnipeg Free Press*, 10 March 1978; "Sgt Prince Honored," *Ibid.*, 20 April 1978; Legislative Assembly of Manitoba, 13 May 2004, 2080; "Monument To Prince Planned," *Winnipeg Free Press*, 17 September 1989; "Not To Be Forgotten," *Ibid.*, 18 December 1988; "Tommy Prince Statue Unveiling Set," *Ibid.*, 5 November 1989; "What About Tommy Prince as a Name for New City Avenue?," *Los Angeles Times*, 31 August 1986, 8; "What's stopping us from honouring Prince?," *Winnipeg Free Press*, 25 October 1987, NT/5; "War Hero's Name Rejected Again," *Ibid.*, 31 December 1989; "Street Renamed," *Ibid.*, 3 January 1990; "Prince Honor Slated," *Ibid.*, 24 May 1990; "Winnipeg Honours War Hero," *Legion Magazine* (January/February 2002), 56.
26. Vit Wagner, "Indian war hero's story told," *Toronto Star*, 30 November 1995; Legislative Assembly of Manitoba, 13 May 2004, 2080-89. The Manitoba Indian Brotherhood also established an educational trust fund in Prince's name. See "Prince's name on trust fund," *Winnipeg Free Press*, 10 April 1978.

Whitney Lackenbauer is assistant professor at St. Jerome's University. His most recent book is *Battle Grounds: The Canadian Military and Aboriginal Lands* (UBC Press, 2007). He provides a more expansive treatment of Tommy Prince in his article "A Hell of a Warrior': Remembering Sergeant Thomas George Prince," *Journal of Historical Biography* vol. 1 (Spring 2007), 26-79, which can be accessed online at <www.ucfv.ca/history/JHB.htm>.

Tommy Prince: Warrior

McKenzie Porter

Reprinted with permission from *Maclean's Magazine* 65/17, 1 September 1952

Sgt. Tommy Prince, grandson of an Indian chief, won ten ribbons fighting Germans, Italians and Chinese. But now the blood of his ancestors demands he fight again to prove a man's color doesn't count on the warpath.

“EVERY HERO,” said Ralph Waldo Emerson, the nineteenth-century American poet, “becomes a bore at last.” And that, according to some old sweats and some new ones, is precisely what happened to Tommy Prince.

During World War Two, Prince, a Manitoba Indian, made a legendary reputation as a Canadian army scout. Last October, protesting strongly, he was posted home from Korea because “his legs had given out.”

Today Sergeant George Thomas Prince, MM, of the Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry, is serving with palpable impatience on the staff of a Canadian Officer Candidate Training School in Ontario. Although he has ten ribbons on his chest, more than any other [Non Commissioned Officer] in the Canadian Army, he still wants more.

Since 1940 Prince has taken air-borne training in England, jungle training in Maryland, mountain training in Vermont, amphibious training in Virginia and snow training in the Canadian north. In combat he's chased Japanese out of the Aleutians, driven Germans out of Italy, booted Italians out of France, and kicked Chinese out of South Korea. Few other Canadian soldiers can lay claim to such widespread experience, yet Sergeant Prince has not had enough.

Camp Borden, his present station, is a vast tract of rolling pineland, surrounding a city of army huts, about sixty miles north of Toronto. It is also a crucible in which the Canadian General Staff melts down all manner of civilians and remolds them into engineers, signalers, medics,

mechanics, gunners, tank men and “poor bloody infantry.”

Ageing warriors of thirty-five and more, looking for a cushy billet in which to await their pensions, sometimes say that a sergeant instructor's appointment at Camp Borden, with its five-day week, white tablecloths, leather armchairs, swimming pool, movies, organized sports, beer and spirits, bed lamps and white sheets, is “just the job.” But Sergeant Prince longs to get back to the fighting, even though he is thirty-six and has an arthritic knee from too much crouching in slit trenches. He lets his wishes be known vociferously in the Sergeants' Mess, respectfully in the Orderly Room, and bitterly, out of the corner of his mouth, when he delivers a case of “thunderflash” fireworks to the young officer cadets so they can play at throwing hand grenades.

In general Sergeant Prince's comrades find his gripe irritating. Most of his fellow instructors have had combat service too and accept with phlegmatic satisfaction the truism that their life in war was “ninety percent tedium and ten percent sheer hell.” None is afraid to admit that he'd have traded the hell for still more tedium. Yet here's a man who should know better still demanding hell all the time. “Well,” says one sergeant, tongue in cheek, “I guess there just isn't enough hell to go around.”

Most of the young officer cadets, of course, who've never been in action, glance at the Military Medal which Sergeant Prince received personally from King George VI and at the Silver Star which he got indirectly from President [F.D.] Roosevelt, and quiver with admiration.

But in the Sergeants' Mess there are NCOs who will tell you that Tommy Prince is “medals mad.” Prince is apt to remark that he missed the Croix de Guerre in France through a clerical error, as if to excuse his shortage of medals. And yet his “fruit salad” consists of the Military Medal, a coveted gallantry decoration, the U.S. Silver Star for conspicuous courage in action, the 1939-45 Star, the Italy Star, France and Germany Star, Defence Medal, War Medal, Canadian Voluntary Service Medal, the Korea Medal for British Commonwealth troops and the United Nations Service Medal, given to all soldiers in the Korean theatre.

In any other man the sergeants of the Officer Candidate School might consider Prince's dissatisfaction with such a show spurious. But they take one look at his thatch of jet-black hair, his dark glittering sloe eyes set in high red-brown cheekbones and his heavy supple bearlike frame and feel certain it is genuine. Their attitude toward him is one of good-humored toleration and affection.

Unlike many Indians Sergeant Prince is loquacious. When he is not talking about fighting he is talking about Indians. There comes a period, after a few beers, when these two subjects get all mixed up. "He lets you know," says one sergeant, "that he has no inferiority complex about his color."

Occasionally, as Prince admits himself, he "ties one on." On one such occasion, long into the night, his comrades heard him muttering strange imprecations, sometimes in an Indian dialect, sometimes in English. The comprehensible passages were all related to injustices suffered by the Indian.

There was a time when Sergeant Prince showed every sign of turning into a crusading politician. He publicly threatened to take the unrequited wrongs of the Indians direct to King George VI. Then the ashes of an old dignity sputtered deep down in the quieter depths of his being. He turned his back on Ottawa and took to the warpath again. Perhaps the ghost of Peguis spoke to him in the night.

Peguis was that chief of the Saulteaux Indians, a branch of the Algonquin Nation, who, during the last century, fell upon the Sioux as they invested Lower Fort Garry and saved the embattled white garrison from a scalping. Peguis' statue stands in St. Boniface, a suburb of Winnipeg, and when he goes home Prince stands and stares at that chiseled stone. Then something akin to stoicism and nobility sets in his massive features. Peguis was Prince's great-grandfather and Prince was born near the site of Peguis' brave encounter.

But the St. Peter's Reserve on the outskirts of Winnipeg was not the same in 1915, when Tommy Prince was born, as it had been in 1871 when Queen Victoria, in a historic treaty, set it aside for his tribe in perpetuity.

The urban fringes of the burgeoning city were lapping at its limits, frightening away the game, polluting the fishing waters, and cramping the Saulteaux ever closer together.

By the early Twenties, when Tommy Prince first went to school, the familiar corrosions of Indian culture were almost complete. His father, no longer known as a chief but merely as a spokesman of the tribe, still spoke an Algonkian dialect. But English came easily to Tommy, the fifth of eleven children. The Princes had taken their English name because they rated as highborn people among their own kind. Among the whites however they were merely dirt poor farmers.

Tommy Prince told his father he wanted to be a lawyer. His father explained that Indians had not enough money for such grandiose schemes. Prince went to an Indian industrial and agricultural school at Elkhorn, Man.

"I learned a bit about farming science and a bit about machinery," he says. He also learned that there is one thing in which the white man makes no distinctions, and that is the color of the skin on the index finger of the right hand which takes the first pressure on the trigger of a Lee-Enfield Mark Three.

"I liked being in the cadets at Elkhorn," he says. "As soon as I put on my uniform I felt a better man. I even tried to wear it in the classroom."

At the age of sixteen, when he left school, he had only reached Grade Eight. But at one hundred yards he could put five bullets through an area as big as a playing card.

This skill served him well through the depression years when he wearied of looking for odd jobs. He could always go up north with an old gun and take a deer. He told of his prowess in the taverns. When he was thrown out of a beer parlor because he was an Indian he grew a mustache. "The waiters took me for a Frenchman," he says, "and I was never thrown out again."

Other Indians who had served in World War One confirmed the notion he had developed at Elkhorn: that once a man gets into an army tunic nobody gives a brass button for his origins.

He resolved to belong to this chosen fraternity. The infantry looked like the best place for an Indian to show his true worth and the autumn of 1939 seemed to present a golden opportunity. All through the last months of '39 he vainly tried to join. Many white men failed to get in too. But nobody could blame Prince for thinking he was barred on account of his race.

Finally, early in 1940, he settled for the 1st Corps Field Park Engineers, a unit whose job would be far behind the lines. In August he sailed to England. His soldiering consisted of working a lathe and guarding a dump.

For two years this monotony hung heavily on him. But his nights were lightened by the attitude of the English toward his skin. In a pub, sooner or later, an Englishman would approach and say, "Are you a real Red Indian?" Tommy would nod. The Englishman would add: "I've never met a real Red Indian before. My children would be awfully interested. Will you come to tea on Sunday?"

Few were as successful as Prince in England at the art of getting their feet under a table. But he tired of being a mere curiosity. While some men awaited the onset of battle with thin trickles of fear Prince's main anxiety was that he'd never see it.

In the middle of 1942 Part One Orders called for volunteers for the paratroops and Prince was the first to step forward. He was one of nine out of a hundred in a student squad to win his wings from a British paratroop school at Ringway near Manchester.

During the assault exercises which followed "the drop" it was noticed that he had a natural instinct for ground. He could wriggle forward on his belly with the agility of a lizard and take advantage of a twelve-inch depression in an otherwise flat field to conceal himself completely from view. He was a magnificent shot. He could live in the open as craftily as a wolf. "It was all born in me," he says. His bearing was so impressive that other men forgot his color and responded willingly to his leadership tests. But Prince never let them forget that he was an Indian. When mail arrived from his father he always used to say as a gag: "I've got a smoke signal from the chief."

In Sept. 1942 he was flown back to Canada to join the 1st Canadian Parachute Battalion. By March 1943 he was a sergeant. When he visited reserves around Winnipeg wearing three stripes, wings and a maroon beret his tribe's attitude toward him reflected pride and respect.

The Canadian Parachute Battalion was attached to the U.S. Special Force, an air-borne formation, and went into American uniforms. Jungle, mountain, amphibious and ski training followed in Canada and the U.S.A. Early in [19]43 when Prince was briefed for a drop on Japanese who had occupied the small island of Kiska in the Aleutians he was exultant at the prospect of combat and dejected on arrival to find the enemy had withdrawn.

It seemed to him that he was never going to get a chance to test his courage.

"All my life," he says, "I had wanted to do something to help my people recover their good name. I wanted to show they were as good as any white man."

His chance came in the fall of '43. Soon after the capture of Naples, Prince landed with his unit in Italy. Hitler was then holding the Gustave [sic] Line, an elaborately fortified defense work hinging on Cassino.

In the night attack on Monte Maggio, a steppingstone to Cassino, Prince saw for the first time men riddled by bullets from the Spandau light machine gun which fired so fast it sounded like a motorbike engine revving up. He learned to walk at the crouch whenever he heard the Nebelwerfer mortar softly coughing up nine big bombs which came fluttering through the air with no more sound than the beat of a bird's wings, then burst around him with the loud flat report of slamming doors and tore men to pieces.

Before his astonished eyes antitank mines tossed a four-ton Bren gun carrier high into the air and crushed its crew; the antipersonnel mines sprang three feet up from the earth, exploded and discharged all around them a withering hail of old ball bearings; and the hideous little wooden shoe mines, at the touch of a boot, took off a man's leg below the knee so neatly and quickly that he stood there on his remaining limb, gaping

in amazement at the bloody amputation spinning away like a Catherine wheel, before he screamed and collapsed.

Through that demonic night, lit by flares and gunfire, Prince heard men who had never been to church calling on their Maker, and saw men who had looked like lions turn into gibbering loons, and trod on sickly sweet tumescent puff balls that had once been men, and he “pressed on, regardless.”

When he got to the top of the mountain in the dawn, vaguely aware of the ragged line of staggering comrades on either side, and of green-faced Germans jumping out of holes and running away, his bursting lungs summoned the breath for a great exultant shout, for in this moment he had come to know the meaning of that ecstasy which unites infantrymen in beer parlors and to realize that on a twentieth-century warpath an Indian brave can still be worth more than many a paleface.

Later, in fieldcraft, he proved superior to all his comrades because silent, swift and unseen movement came naturally to him. The battalion made him reconnaissance sergeant.

He would crawl out by night toward the enemy, sometimes alone, sometimes with a small patrol, listening to Germans murmuring, and estimating their number. He would crawl out by day and watch the enemy runners dodging among the olive groves, and fix their defensive positions. Before every attack he snaked around the battalion front and came back with information on a track that would take the jeep ambulances, a wood that would shelter the radio truck, or a gully that would cover the approach of a platoon.

Sometimes he stayed out twenty-four hours with a sniper rifle picking off a man here and

there to unnerve the enemy. Once he went out hunting a German sniper who had been harassing his own battalion, engaged him in a movie-like shooting duel and brought him toppling down out of a tree like a big dead bird.

Prince’s most famous exploit took place at Anzio beachhead where he spent ninety days in the line in early 1944. Huge squat Royal Tiger tanks of the Germans were firing from two thousand yards, then changing position before the allied antitank gunners could spot them and take aim.

By night, carrying a field telephone, Prince wriggled eighteen hundred yards out in front of the battalion. At this time both Germans and Allies had ceased to use houses as cover because, being so obvious, they attracted fire. Knowing this Prince chose a shattered house only two hundred



Library and Archives Canada (LAC) PA 142287

Sergeant Tommy Prince (right) with his brother, Private Morris Prince, February 1945.

yards from the Germans. He hoped they would never suspect they were being observed from a place so flagrantly under their noses, and his audacity paid off.

The next morning he heard a Royal Tiger crashing through some trees and watched its ugly snout breathe flame. Calmly, over the telephone, he pinpointed its position. Within a minute Allied gunners had knocked it out. A few hours later, he helped bag a second tank.

Around noon on the second day a small mortar shell whispered over his house, fell at the back, and cut his telephone wire.

Prince believed the Germans had suspected his presence and would go on shelling until they got him. If he withdrew he would be mown down. Yet his presence was purposeless until the line was repaired. He decided to resolve all three problems immediately.

Hanging in the house were an old black Italian hat, black jacket and white muffler. Prince put these on and ran into the open in imitation of those many excitable Italians who were often seen pitifully hanging onto their homes between the opposing armies. He darted over to a chicken coop as if inspecting it for damage. Then he doubled round to the back, found the broken cable and repaired it.

Once more he did a little dervish dance for the Germans' benefit. Then he went inside, took up his old position, and resumed contact with the battalion.

The ruse succeeded. No more mortar shells fell on the house. But by nightfall Prince's forward observation work had claimed two more Royal Tigers. He returned to his lines after forty-eight hours.

"You crazy fool," said an officer. "If you'd been taken prisoner in those clothes you'd have been shot out of hand."

Prince took part in the seizure of coastal islands during the invasion of Southern France, went on to the mainland and advanced along the Riviera toward the northwest Italian frontier, where his unit was held up by natural mountainous defenses. On one occasion, with

another man, Prince sneaked through the German front and scouted fifteen miles behind the enemy lines. They located the big German bivouac area they were looking for and started back to report. On the way they saw a skirmish taking place between a German platoon and a squad of FFI, Free French partisans. The FFI were being encircled by Germans. Prince and his comrade took up well concealed positions and began to pick off Germans from the rear. The German platoon commander was concentrating so heavily on the FFI he never became aware of the two Canadians.

Prince knows for sure he killed six Germans and reckons he wounded many more who were eventually carried away. The Germans never fired back so the two Canadians might just as well have been in a shooting gallery. Eventually the German officer, surprised and shaken by his high casualties, withdrew.

Prince then made contact with the FFI. "Where is the rest of your company?" asked the FFI officer. "Here," said Prince, indicating the grinning private at his side. "*Mon Dieu*," said the FFI officer, "I thought there were at least fifty of you!"

The FFI accompanied Prince back to the Canadian-American lines. Almost immediately Prince set off again, at the head of his battalion, and led them to a cleanout of the German bivouac area. Before that battle was over he had covered fifty miles on foot without rest. The Americans gave him the Silver Star and the French, he says, recommended him for the Croix de Guerre which he never got because of an oversight.

When the battle of Southern France was won Prince's unit was detached from the Americans and he went into Canadian uniform again.

They returned to England where Prince was summoned to an investiture at Buckingham Palace. As the string orchestra of the Guards Brigade played soft music he walked up the long carpeted ramp, did a smart left turn, bowed, took two short paces forward, and faced the little figure in naval officer's uniform.

The King pinned the Military Medal on his chest and said: "I've seen you before." "Yes, sir,"



Sergeant Tommy Prince (second from left) listens to Major G.A. Flint, a company commander in the 2nd Battalion, Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry, as he points out the next objective and briefs his men on the plan of attack, Korea, 11 March 1951.

said Prince, "you spoke to me when you inspected my unit in Surrey three years ago."

The King asked him about his service and about where he came from and about the Indians on the reserve in Manitoba. "He spoke to me for two minutes," says Prince, "but most of the others only got about thirty seconds."

Prince later volunteered for the Far East. "I'd been trained for parachutes but nearly all my combat had been straight infantry stuff," he says. "I hoped that in the Far East I'd get a chance to do a fighting jump." He was returned to Canada late in [19]45 and, because of the Japanese collapse, discharged.

Like many other returned veterans he found his home was not the same and got a divorce from his wife. His father had died while he was overseas. He made his living cutting pulp wood

and very soon he was just another Indian again. When he applied for a game warden's job and was refused on account of his race he was enraged.

He became Chairman of the Manitoba Indian Association, and went to Ottawa. Before a special parliamentary committee he complained about white encroachments on game and fishing rights. He asked for grants to Indian veterans, financial assistance for the establishment of co-operative Indian farms; better schools for Indian children, and more teachers.

He was bewildered by the mass of legal verbiage in which he found himself involved and once, angry at his lack of progress, he said in an interview: "If we can't make headway with them there is nothing for us to do but go right to His Majesty. After all the original treaties were made with Queen Victoria."

Some reforms in the Indian Act were made but not enough to satisfy Prince. The life of his people remained largely unchanged.

Once when a band of northern Manitoba Indians were in trouble for an infringement of hunting regulations Prince interceded successfully on their behalf.

Although he could easily have left the reserve and become an enfranchised Canadian he preferred to remain a Treaty Indian because "you never know when you might get a chance to do something for them."

Prince is not very precise in what he wants for Indians but you can tell in his conversation that he is comparing their past with their present and is concerned largely with their prestige. Consciously or unconsciously he made a personal contribution to the Indians' good by his heroism. And this may have influenced him to re-enlist in 1950 when the government called for volunteers for Korea.

Five years is a long time in an infantryman's life. Although he took turns with a subaltern leading the platoon in Korea, and set his men an example of courageous calm when the Chinese prepared for attack with bugle blasts, whistles and shouting, it was noticed that the hill climbing exhausted him.

When finally he was cajoled into taking a medical examination the [Medical Officers] found an arthritic condition of the knee that must have kept him in perpetual agony and seriously impaired his agility.

Last October he was shipped back to Canada against his will. At Camp Borden, as at all base depots, there is a lot of square bashing and even though Prince realizes as well as anyone else that herein lies the secret of army discipline he has no fondness for it.

"God knows though," says one sergeant, "he tries hard enough. He is always well turned out. But he just isn't dapper."

Others have noted that when Prince comes up to the salute the gesture is sometimes exaggerated by that tiny trifle that can make it absurd.

Nor is he brilliant at any instructive period save fieldcraft. Then Prince still comes into his own. But most of his time is spent distributing equipment for exercises and lectures, calling parades, posting up orders, inspecting billets and other duties of Administrative Sergeant.

One of his nicknames is "Medals," another, "Big Chief Pocahontas."

There is one story about Prince told by a warrant officer which casts glimmer of light into the troubled black well of his personality.

"Last Hallowe'en," says this man, "we had a dance. We were all sitting round having a drink with our wives and girl friends. Prince was there, the only man without a girl. He was very well behaved, paying the ladies great respect. When we got talking about the dancing he said he would give us a surprise later on."

Toward the end of the evening the MC announced the company would now see a different kind of dancing. Then on came Sergeant Prince in full Indian regalia. He had no real braids of hair but he had laboriously plaited artificial ones out of army boot laces. His war dance began. There were shouts and cheers and clapping of hands. The dance went on and on until it seemed as though Prince had forgotten his surroundings and the audience became restless. Then some thing happened which brought him to a sudden stop, and he walked off the floor.

"What was the matter?" he was asked later.

Stonily he replied: "I was getting to the important part when they all started laughing at me."

Soon afterward he put in his application for a second tour of duty in Korea. At this writing the application has not been granted. But Sergeant Prince's leg is getting better and one day soon it is possible he will be back in the line trying to recover the long-lost glory of his race.

As Havelock Ellis once wrote: "Those persons who are burning to display heroism may rest assured that the course of social evolution will offer them every opportunity."