Winnipeg | Indigenous Relations
Relations avec les Autochtones

JOURNEY OF RECONCILIATION
LES CHEMINS DE LA RÉCONCILIATION

WELCOMING WINNIPEG – Request Summary

NOTE: Request summaries are compiled by Indigenous Relations employees to ensure that identifiable, or potentially identifiable, third-party personal information or information of a sensitive nature is excluded from what is made publicly available. Indigenous Relations permits viewing of the full original submission by appointment through 311.

Request ID: 2021-006

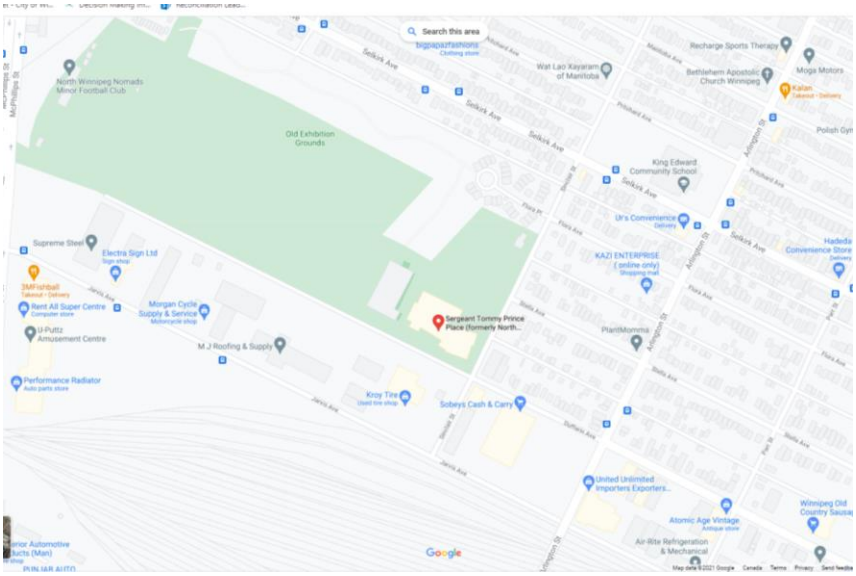
Name of Request: Creating New Historical Marker – Sergeant Tommy Prince

Address: Sergeant Tommy Prince Place (90 Sinclair Street)

Demonstrated Community Support:

- Petition submitted: No. Due to COVID due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic and physical distancing precautions, the City has temporarily suspended this requirement.
- Letters of support provided: 2

Project Details:



Draft panels for new historical marker:

Sargent Tommy Prince MM SS (1915–1977)

Thomas George ‘Tommy’ Prince was born in 1915, one of eleven children of Henry and Arabella Prince of the Brokenhead Ojibway Reserve (Baaskaandibewiziibing), located 80 kilometres north of Winnipeg. He was the great-great-grandson prominent Saulteaux Chief Peguis. He died in Winnipeg in 1977 and was given a full military burial at Brookside Cemetery.

During World War II, Sargent Tommy Prince was recommended for the American Silver Star with ribbon, awarded for gallantry in action. Only 59 Canadian soldiers were awarded this medal during World War II and only Prince and two others were awarded the Military Medal, the Commonwealth’s award for bravery in battle on land. He received these medals at Buckingham Palace, decorated by King George VI. The citation read in part:

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.



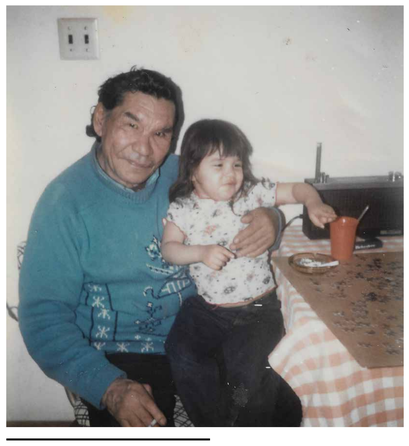
Major G.A. Flint, Company Commander of the 2nd Battalion, Princess Patricia Canadian Light Infantry, points out the next objective with Sargent Prince next to him on the major’s right, 1951.

BILL OLSON/CANADA. DEPARTMENT OF NATIONAL DEFENCE, LIBRARY AND ARCHIVES CANADA, ACCESSION NUMBER 1967-052, ITEM NUMBER SF-853, PA-114890



Sergeant Tommy Prince (R) with his brother, Private Morris Prince, receives his Military Medal at Buckingham Palace, Feb 1945.

CHRISTOPHER J. WOODS/CANADA. DEPT. OF NATIONAL DEFENCE/LIBRARY AND ARCHIVES CANADA/PA-142289



Tommy Prince holding his granddaughter

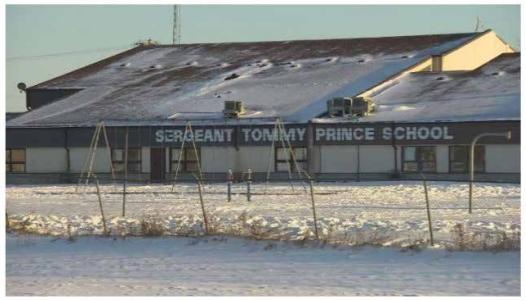
PRIVATE COLLECTION

Tommy at home

In his early years, Prince was surrounded by family, friends and community. But like thousands of other Indigenous children, he suffered the long-term negative affects of being forced to attend residential school. Uprooted and sent almost 650 kilometres away to the Elkhorn Residential School, he described himself as “a real rascal”.

But it was at Elkhorn that Prince would also discover his destiny – he joined the cadets. “As soon as I put on my [cadet] uniform I felt like a better man. I even tried to wear it to class.”

He dropped out of school at age 14 to return home to work to help support his family.



Sergeant Tommy Prince School on the Brokenhead Reserve became one of 10 Manitoba schools to form the Manitoba First Nations School System in 2017. It was the first Indigenous school system in Canada, created with 1,700 students and is operated solely by the First Nations member communities.

CREDIT: M. PETERSON

Tommy Prince in his mother’s arms at home on the Brokenhead Reserve, ca.1916.

TOMMY PRINCE JR. AND JIM BEAR

Tommy Prince playing hockey for the “Eagles,” date unknown.

TOMMY PRINCE JR. AND JIM BEAR

Young Private Tommy Prince, Royal Canadian Engineers, ca.1940.

TOMMY PRINCE JR. AND JIM BEAR

Tommy at war

Tommy served three tours: as a paratrooper and member of the 1st Special Service Force “the Devil’s Brigade” during the Second World War (1940-1945); and two tours during the Korean War (1950-1951 and 1952-1953) where he distinguished himself in several key battles.

Prince was known for his skill, bravery, and leadership and continually held himself to extremely high standards for which he was awarded 10 medals (an eleventh was awarded posthumously).

Prince was also recommended to receive the Croix de Guerre from France, but those instructions were lost when the messenger was killed en route to the French Commander-in-Chief.

Prince’s medals were discovered in an auction in Ontario in 2000, a fundraising drive resulted in their purchase and they are now on permanent display at the Manitoba Museum.

THE MEDALS

Military Medal
Silver Star with ribbon (U.S.A.)
1939-1945 Star
Italy Star
France and Germany Star
Defence Medal
Canadian Volunteer Service
  Medal with Clasp

War Medal
Korea Medal (Canadian version)
United Nations Korea Medal

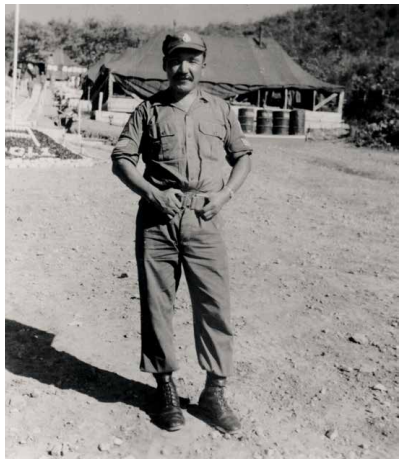
Posthumously:
Republic of Korea Ambassador
  for Peace Medal

> **“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.”**
>
> —Korean Platoon commander commenting on Tommy Prince’s last tour of duty



This painting of Prince shows him proudly wearing his U.S. military uniform of the 1st Special Service Force “the Devil’s Brigade”. On his left shoulder is the Combat Infantry Badge – a red arrowhead with the USA and CANADA stitched in white lettering.

TOMMY PRINCE JR. AND JIM BEAR



Sargent Prince in Korea,1953

TOMMY PRINCE JR. AND JIM BEAR



Tommy Prince’s medals on display at the Manitoba Museum

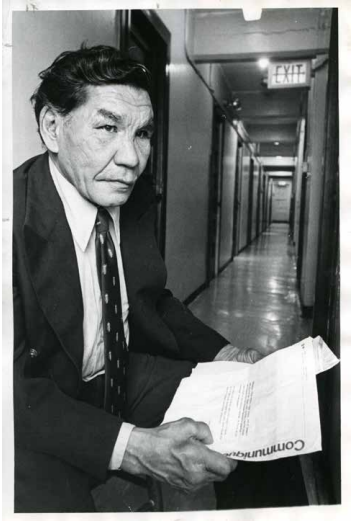
GRAJEWSKI PHOTOGRAPH

Tommy’s struggles

The evidence strongly suggests that Tommy Prince, who served in both Europe and Korea, suffered from Posttraumatic Stress Disorder, negatively affecting all parts of his life. There was nowhere he could turn for help.

Prince also endured open racism which he had not been subject to in the military. As an Aboriginal man, he was not allowed to vote in provincial and federal elections — in spite of his wartime service — and was refused the same benefits as other Canadian veterans.

Suffering from PTSD and debilitating arthritis in both knees, he struggled to find work and became destitute. As one biographer saw it, he “fit a tragic pattern of veterans of twentieth-century wars who suffered from PTSD but who were neglected by their societies.”



Tommy Prince, age 61, November 1976, in the hallway of his home at the Salvation Army Hostel, Logan Avenue, Winnipeg. Photograph by Frank Chalmers.

UNIVERSITY OF MANITOBA ARCHIVES & SPECIAL COLLECTIONS - WINNIPEG TRIBUNE FONDS (PC 18, A.81-12)

Princess Patricia’s Canadian Light Infantry honour guard at Tommy Prince’s funeral, Brookside Cemetery, Winnipeg, 1977. More than 500 people attended his funeral, including Manitoba’s lieutenant governor and the consuls from France, Italy and the United States.

CREDIT: UNIVERSITY OF MANITOBA ARCHIVES & SPECIAL COLLECTIONS - WINNIPEG TRIBUNE FONDS (PC 18, A.81-12)

“Soldier’s Heart” “Shell Shocked” “Battle Fatigue” – the story of Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)

More soldiers left World War II battlefields during the height of the conflict because of psychological complications than could be replaced by soldiers coming out of basic training.

Korean War Veterans suffered great psychological trauma and, like their World War II counterparts, were reluctant to seek help or describe their symptoms.

Veterans usually coped with their symptoms both constructively and destructively.

Increased study of the mental wellness of veterans was undertaken in the 1970s leading to the identification and acceptance of PTSD as a diagnostic category in 1980.

> **“We as Aboriginal Veterans got fooled... we got acclimatized to the non-Native way of living through the war years, and for a period of time we became equal in the non-Native world, or so we thought. Upon return to civil life, and back on the reservation, our bubble soon burst.”**
>
> —H. Saulis, Moncton, NB veteran’s testimony at the Royal Commission on Aboriginal People, 1993

Tommy's legacy

Despite the many obstacles, Prince took a lead role in advocacy for Indigenous people between the wars and after his discharge.

He fought for housing, education, entrepreneurialism, the repeal of the Indian Act, First Nations rights and increased agricultural training and production on reserves.

Tommy Prince's legacy, in the military and as a private citizen, is his efforts to improve the lives of Indigenous people through his actions.

Statesman, lobbyist, educator, entrepreneur, visionary and warrior – he was all of these.

> **"I see the good works that my father's legacy continues on today with the army cadet corps, and his good name still advocates strongly for all First Nations people and those that have and those that still continue to serve in the military of our great nation."**
>
> —Tommy Prince's daughter

> **"All my life 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."**
>
> —T. Prince



Tommy Prince Memorial, Kildonan Park, Main Street, Winnipeg, dedicated, Remembrance Day, 1989 by the officers and men of the Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry beside the monument to his great-great-grandfather, Chief Peguis.

CREDIT: M. PETERSON

Tommy Prince in his role as advocate for Manitoba's Indigenous population, making a presentation as the head of the Manitoba Indian Association in 1946 before the Royal Commission on the Revision of the Indian Act, 1871.

WINNIPEG TRIBUNE, DECEMBER 7, 1946, P. 17.

Glenbow Archives PA-3820-1-7

Tommy Prince (second from the right) being honored at a special Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry ceremony on the Brokenhead Reserve, 1975

GLENBOW ARCHIVES PA-3820-1-7

Sergeant Tommy Prince Place

The large site that the Sergeant Tommy Prince Recreational Centre sits on has a long history.

In the 1890s, it was known as the Winnipeg Exhibition Grounds, and from 1891-1914, it hosted the Winnipeg Agriculture and Industrial Fair. The 1914 Winnipeg Stampede drew 50,000 people to its grandstand, midway, and roller coaster.

In March 1970, a new facility on the long-abandoned Exhibition Grounds was officially opened, Centennial Pool. City Council voted to use funding set aside for a new downtown library to complete this important North End facility, located next to the indoor arena built in 1958.

In 2010, work was completed on a $7.5 million addition and renovation that added a gym, classrooms, kitchens and fitness area and created a green roof area, solar wall system to increase environmental friendliness and eye-catching, mosaic tile exterior cladding.

On July 19, 2017City council unanimously voted to rename the expanded facility “Sergeant Tommy Prince Place” to commemorate Prince’s heroism and legacy. It is now a hub of community activity.



A portion of the crowd in the Exhibition Ground grandstand, ca.1918

CREDIT: WINNIPEG PUBLIC LIBRARY, MARTIN BERMAN POSTCARD COLLECTION.



The interior of Centennial Pool with its 3-metre diving platform, 1970.

CITY OF WINNIPEG ARCHIVES, PARKS AND RECREATION COLLECTION, COMMUNITY INFRASTRUCTURE AND PROGRAMMING, CENTENNIAL POOL, BOX 58, FILE 24, ITEM 6, 3 SEPTEMBER 1970, PHOTO BY HUGH ALLAN.



North Centennial Recreation and Leisure Facility, Sinclair Street, 2010.

BRIDGMANCOLLABORATIVE ARCHITECTURE

How does this project contribute to a 'Welcoming Winnipeg', as defined in the policy and what kind of evidence/research can be provided to support this statement?

Staff at Sergeant Tommy Prince Place are constantly asked for information on Mr. Prince, this interpretive installation will celebrate his life and give visitors a glimpse into his life.

Does this site have historical significance to the Indigenous community? Research Support:

Yes.

Tommy Prince is one of Canada's most recognized and decorated Indigenous soldiers but most of the public biographical information deals only with his military exploits. His legacy is much greater, including his advocacy role for Indigenous rights. The research and installation will describe this legacy.

If this application is not supported, what would the negative impact on the community be? (If applicable)

This is a chance to tell Mr. Prince's life story, supported by information from his children and family. It will give a more complete picture of the man - his struggles and his successes.

Any additional information the applicant would like the CCM to consider in making their recommendation.

Please see research/background information about Sergeant Tommy Prince below.

Winnipeg Tribune article:



The Winnipeg Tribune

WINNIPEG, WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 4, 1946 PAGE 13

I Write What I See

By TED SCHRADER

Buying Spree Booms Above 1945 Records

Lougheed Cites Food Poison Case

City health officer Dr. Morley Lougheed told the Kiwanis club at luncheon Tuesday that recently 120 people had been poisoned by food served at a local dinner and that caterer responsible had settled for damages out of court to avoid publicity.

Emphasizing the need for constant care in restaurant sanitation, Dr. Lougheed explained that 150 persons had attended the dinner and something that was served had made it necessary for 120 to receive medical attention.

"An outbreak like that can occur at any time," he declared. "It usually happens when food is prepared in advance. . . like meat pie, chicken mixtures, cream fillings. . . and set aside at room temperature which is ideal for germ growth."

The lack of refrigeration and the lack of trained staff combined to make an ever-present danger the health officers said. Last spring over 3,000 local food handlers were given instruction in the most important methods of protecting the public.

"We've had the fullest co-operation from the Manitoba Restaurant association. This film I'm showing who purchased by C. E. Monro and given to us for educational use," Dr. Lougheed said. "Restaurants and department stores that serve food gave their employes time to attend our course of lectures. The film is called Betwixt Cup and Lip. I've seen it about 15 times and I see something more in it each time."

The film, made in New York, showed the right and wrong way to wash and sterilize dishes. The recreation centre just dipped the cups in a bucket of water. The beer parlor didn't have hot water—at least 170 degrees for sterilization. Customers complained of lip stick and finger smears on glasses.

The health inspector went to work with his water thermometer: this was better, 173 degrees. That was right, turn the glasses upside down, carry the cups by the handles, not with a thumb and finger inside the rim.

Edward Martin introduced Dr. Lougheed and Frank Garland thanked him.

TRIBUNE QUIZ GOES ON AIR AT 8 TONIGHT

Another Tribune Quiz will get underway tonight when announcer Wilf Davidson on the stage of the Metropolitan theatre draws the names of eight more

INDIANS ON WARPATH: Sgt. Tommy Prince, of Scanterbury, Man., won many honors against the Germans and Italians. Now he is leading Manitoba treaty Indians in a fight for Indian reforms. Here he is shown watching Chief Cornelius Bignell (right) of The Pas Reserve hand over a brief of grievances to William Bryce, M.P. (centre) a member of the Royal Commission to revise the Indian Act.

F. O. Cruse Gets Posthumous Award

Mrs. William A. Cruse

Smith Heads

November Second High in Business

By DON AIKEN

Under pressure of post-war shortages and increased purchasing power in the hands of the buying public, October in the past two years has relinquished to November its traditional place as second busiest retail sales month of the year.

Cash and credit figures for October and November shows that Winnipeggers are on a buying spree that tops 1945's high figures, and is away ahead of retail transactions for 1938, last full peace-time year.

Comparing 1945 with 1946, retail store officials pointed out that last year, for the first time in the history of the trade, November sales were above October, and this change-over in buying emphasis has carried on into 1946.

The big jump is seen when comparing 1938 figures with those for this year. October 1946 has gone between 100 and 110 percent ahead of the last peacetime year's sales, while November, in its new character as second largest sales month, is up 155 percent above 1938.

October 1946 is about 20 percent above October 1945, while the November increase over last year is about 18 percent, a survey of Winnipeg stores shows.

In addition, shop officials say, there has been a substantial increase in the proportion of retail sales made on a credit basis, in 1946 compared to 1945.

Winnipeg credit clearing officials state that inquiries for credit ratings are now climbing back toward pre-war levels, but state that spending money was available during the war years.

Credit men say that with the return to the market of large quantities of consumer goods now in short supply—a return which is expected within a year—credit applications will skyrocket. There are still a good many people who are withstanding the temptation to spend now, and who are retaining war savings while awaiting the return of a buyers' market.

2 Men Plead Guilty in Assault Case

Two men were charged today with assault occasioning actual bodily harm to 50-year-old Louis Antoine, badly beaten in a rooming house brawl at his home at 54 Francis st. Monday night.

Benjamin Morrisette, 25, 487 Elgin ave., and Joseph Wesley Sharpe, 20, 88 Charlotte st.,

New monument to Sgt. Tommy Prince unveiled

By: Alexandra Paul

Posted: **10/6/2013 3:51 PM** | Last Modified: 10/8/2013 3:46 PM | Updates | Comments: 0



JOHN WOODS / WINNIPEG FREE PRESS

Elder Velma Orvis blesses a monument to Sgt. Tommy Prince with Donald Mackey after an unveiling it during a monument re-dedication memorial service at Sgt Tommy Prince Veterans Park Sunday.

A new monument to one of Canada's most decorated aboriginal soldiers was unveiled Sunday in a ceremony that brought together descendants of Sgt. Tommy Prince, dignitaries, military veterans and a cadet corps named in the soldier's honour.

The boulder with Prince's name is located at the Veteran Military Plaza located south of Battery Street and Selkirk Avenue. It replaces one that was vandalized. It caps 16 years of efforts by former serviceman Donald Mackey to honour Prince, a man he knew when both were in the military in the 1950s.

"I'm just realizing I'm going to be winding this down," said Mackey at the conclusion of the event, marked by prayers, an elder's sage-smudge, a lament on the bagpipes and the presence of some of Prince's family.

Tommy Prince Jr., the soldier's son, said his father would have been happy with the memorial and the turnout.



JOHN WOODS / WINNIPEG FREE PRESS

Tommy Prince Jr. watches a monument re-dedication memorial service at Sgt Tommy Prince Veterans Park Sunday.

"I was touched, very touched," said Prince. My father would have been very happy if he was here with everything being done. The family appreciates Mr. Mackey."

Starting in 1997, Mackey spearheaded countless tributes, gathering public and military support for initiatives that included a cadet corps set up in Prince's name, murals on Sgt. Tommy Prince Street, the park that was the site of the unveil, named in his honour and displays installed at Sgt. Tommy Prince School in Brokenhead First Nation where Prince grew up, and at Sir Sam Steele Legion on Salter Street.

Another monument Mackey raised money for can be seen at the Freight House on Isabel Street in Winnipeg.

Brokenhead Chief Jim Bear, a nephew of Prince's, attended the ceremony and recalled the time he and Mackey teamed up to save Tommy Prince's medals. Prince had sold his military medals and they changed hands several times before coming up for auction in 2001. Bear organized a fundraising campaign to buy them and donated them to the Manitoba Museum in a lasting tribute.

"We got 'em back," Bear said as the two men reminisced after the ceremony.

It was replicas of those medals that were drilled out of the original monument at the park on Battery Street in the act of vandalism which defaced the original monument that this latest one replaced Sunday.

Centre named after war hero

NCRLC now called Sergeant Tommy Prince Place

By: Ligia Braidotti

Posted: **03/26/2018 12:39 PM** | Comments: 2



SUPPLIED PHOTO

On March 17, the North Centennial Recreation and Leisure Centre was renamed to Sergeant Tommy Prince Place, honouring Indigenous war hero Tommy Prince.

The North Centennial Recreation and Leisure Centre is now named after a war hero.



SUPPLIED PHOTO
Tommy Prince Jr., Sergeant Prince's second-oldest son received a framed motion that was unanimously approved by city council on July 19, 2017.

On March 17, veterans, serving members of the Canadian Armed Forces and dignitaries joined family and community members in an official ceremony to rename the centre to Sergeant Tommy Prince Place where a new sign was unveiled.

Sgt. Thomas George Prince was a war hero and Indigenous advocate. He was Canada's most-decorated Indigenous war veteran, being awarded 11 medals while he served in the Second World War and as a member of the 2nd Battalion Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry (2PPCLI) during the Korean War. The medals include the Canadian Korea Medal, the Canadian Volunteer Service Medal and the United Nations Service Medal as well as the Silver Star awarded by the United States of America.

He died in Winnipeg in 1977 and was honoured not only by Manitoba and Canada but also by the governments of France, Italy and United States.

This is the first time Winnipeg has a community centre named after an Indigenous military, and Point Douglas Councillor Mike Pagtakhan said he considers it to be a significant achievement for the country.

"Sgt. Tommy Prince is a national and international icon of courage," Pagtakhan said at the unveiling. "A descendant of the great Chief Peguis, he showed tremendous courage both on the battlefield and in his tireless work on behalf of Indigenous peoples. It is my hope, and the hope of Winnipeg city council, that this centre in the heart of Point Douglas, which now bears his name, will help keep his achievements and his sacrifice shining brightly in the memories of all Winnipeggers and all Canadians."

City council unanimously voted to rename the North Centennial Recreation and Leisure Facility to Sergeant Tommy Prince Place to commemorate Prince's heroism and legacy on July 19, 2017.

"I appreciate city council made this possible and I'm very happy," Tommy Prince Jr., Prince's second-oldest son, spoke at the event.

Sergeant Tommy Prince Place, located at 90 Sinclair St., is a hub of activity for the community. The facility features an indoor pool, boardroom, classroom, community use room, gymnasium, studio and teaching kitchen. Outside of the facility, the site offers baseball diamonds, soccer pitches and will soon feature a new spray pad for summer 2018.

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https://553sgttommyprincearmycadets.ca/program

553 SGT TOMMY PRINCE MM ARMY CADETS

ADVENTURE . CHALLENGE . LEADERSHIP

ARMY CADET PROGRAM



Field Training

Field training is one of the most popular cadet activities in the Army Cadet program. You will start by learning the basics living in the field and advance to survival skills including constructing improvised shelters and recognizing outdoor hazards. Cadets learn how to work together as a section in the field, leading to commanding your own section. Field training is taught throughout the year and is extended during summer training over a number of days. Teamwork and communication are just some of the skills developed in field training exercises that are readily transferable to everyday life.

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JOURNEY OF RECONCILIATION
LES CHEMINS DE LA RÉCONCILIATION



Biathlon

Biathlon develops power, endurance, strength, skill, precision and calm under pressure for cadets. The sport is a combination of cross-country skiing and marksmanship. But it is not that simple. After skiing fast and hard, biathletes must calm themselves to take accurate and controlled shots at targets 50 meters away. In a single race cadet competitors can ski up to 10 kilometers and shoot 20 targets. The clock is always running. It's action-packed, physically-demanding and extraordinary to watch.

Marksmanship



The Cadet Marksmanship Program is a challenging and competitive sports program accessible to all cadets. It develops skills through superior training and Olympic-style competition. Every year thousands of cadets participate in this fun and rewarding program. Cadets have the opportunity to participate in a series of competitions at the local level that culminate in provincial/territorial competitions and the annual National Cadet Marksmanship Championship.

Adventure Training



Being an Army Cadet means you get the opportunity to take part in a wide range of Adventure Training opportunities, including abseiling, caving, kayaking, open canoeing, rock-climbing, trekking, skiing, mountaineering, diving and white-water rafting.

Summer Training



The 23 Cadet Summer Training Centres across Canada offer a variety of exciting and dynamic training courses. Some are located in unique settings such as the Rocky Mountains of Alberta, north of 60° in Whitehorse, Yukon and the Pacific coast in Comox, British Columbia. Others offer specialized training. Saint-Jean-sur-Richelieu, Québec, for example, offers an introduction to aerospace course and the Centre of Excellence for Marksmanship in Ottawa, Ontario offers advanced training in marksmanship. Regardless of where a cadet goes for summer training, he or she is certain to have a fun and rewarding summer. Summer training offers an opportunity to travel - for some internationally while for others it means meeting new people from across Canada while learning.

Music Program

Bands play a significant role in the units of the Canadian Cadet Organization. Cadet bands provide their corps/squadrons with accomplishment for ceremonial occasions, add visibility within the community and build esprit de' corps. The music program provides individual cadets with challenging worth-while means of developing as cadets, musicians and members of the community.



15 Great Canadian Stories: Tommy Prince, the decorated and forgotten war hero

BRUCE DEACHMAN, OTTAWA CITIZEN

Updated: September 30, 2017

https://ottawacitizen.com/news/local-news/15-great-canadian-stories-tommy-prince-decorated-and-forgotten

"He used to carry a pair of moccasins in his bag with him. He would never tell anyone where he was going, but would just slip away in the night. The Germans thought he was a ghost or a devil. They could never figure out how he passed the lines and the sentries. He was deathly quiet. Instead of sneaking in and killing them, he would steal something, like a pair of shoes right off their feet. Or he would leave articles behind, like a calling card, just to let them know he had been there. Once in a while, he would kill one of them, slit their throat so as not to awaken anybody. When those Germans woke up and found one of their own lying dead in the midst of them, that's when they got scared. They didn't believe that Prince could be real, so they figured he must be an evil spirit or better yet the devil. We were known as the Devil's Brigade to the Germans."
— One of Tommy Prince's comrades, describing his stealth behind enemy lines during the Second World War.

His is one of the great tragedies of Canadian military — and social — history. Tommy Prince, an Indigenous Canadian war hero and among the country's most decorated non-commissioned officers, gave everything he had for his country in two conflicts — the Second World War and Korea — yet due to systemic racism was largely forgotten by that same country when he, himself, fell: an alcoholic who spent his last days in a small, sparsely furnished room in the Salvation Army's Social Service Centre in Winnipeg, his medals either pawned or lost, his spirit damaged beyond repair.

"Remembrance," P. Whitney Lackenbauer poignantly wrote in A Hell of a Warrior: Remembering Sergeant Thomas George Prince, "particularly in the official policy domain, always involves a calculated amount of forgetting."

Born in a canvas tent in 1915 and raised on the Brokenhead Reserve, about 70 kilometres northwest of Winnipeg, Thomas George Prince was the great-great grandson of Saulteaux Chief Peguis, and his forebears served on the Crown's side in the Red River Rebellion, as Nile River Voyageurs in Sudan, and in Europe during the First World War.

One of 11 children in his family, he attended residential school from the age of five, and joined the army cadets, where he became an excellent marksman.

"As soon as I put on my uniform," he once remarked, "I felt like a better man. I even tried to wear it to class."

He reluctantly dropped out of school after Grade 8 to earn money for his family, working as a lumberjack, among other jobs, during the Depression. In 1940, at 24, he joined the Royal Canadian Engineers and, six weeks later, was sent to England, where he grew bored operating a lathe on home guard duty. "I joined the army to fight," a fellow RCE member recalled him saying, "not to sit around drinking tea."

So, in 1942, he answered a call for parachutists for the Canadian Parachute Battalion, which was then attached to the United States Special Force, or Green Berets, in an elite U.S.-Canadian commando unit known as the First Special Service Force, or Devil's Brigade.

"Tom was ideal for this type of a unit," said FSSF platoon sergeant Al Lennox. "He was brave, he was intelligent. In his early days as a young man, he was out living off the land, getting (his) own game, learning how to track, and how to walk right, without making a noise. So all those attributes came in very handy in this type of a unit."

Prince claimed his abilities were innate, pointing to his Indigenous roots. "Once a man was in an army uniform no one cared about his origin," wrote D. Bruce Sealey and Peter Van De Vyvere in Manitobans in Profile: Thomas George Prince. "Prince, however, felt it necessary to represent Indians as a people and never let the men forget his racial origin."



On March 21, 1951, a Princess Patricia's company commander points out the unit's next objective and briefs his officers and NCOs. The soldier, second from the left, is the legendary sniper, Sgt. Tommy Prince. SUN FILE PHOTO

His feats of derring-do frequently stood him head and shoulders above other soldiers. At Anzio, Italy, during the winter of 1944, for example, he volunteered for a nighttime

reconnaissance mission, running a telephone line about a kilometre and a half into enemy territory and setting up an observation post in an abandoned farmhouse less than 200 metres from the German line. From there, he could send back information on enemy positions. But when shell fire cut the line the following day, he came up with an ingenious solution. Donning civilian clothes that he found in the house, he went outside and, posing as an Italian farmer, inspected the chicken coop and pretended to weed his crops as the Germans looked on, a ruse that allowed him to repair the broken line.

“He maintained his charade,” recounted Lackenbauer, “shaking his fists at the Germans and the Allies, then returned to the house and resumed communications with his unit.”

As a result of Prince’s efforts that day, four German tanks were destroyed and Prince was awarded his first medal, the Military Medal, with Lt.-Col. Thomas Gilday noting that Prince’s “courage and utter disregard for personal safety were an inspiration to his fellows and a marked credit to his unit.”

Prince also received the Silver Star, one of only 59 Canadians awarded the U.S. honour, and among only three who also received the Military Medal. It total, he was awarded 11 medals that today are kept at the Manitoba Museum in Winnipeg.

But not all Prince’s colleagues were so obviously moved by his disregard for safety. One FSSF soldier recalled another remark “There goes Prince trying to win another medal to prove he is brave,” while Prince, as he set sail for his second tour in Korea, in 1952, reportedly announced “I’m not coming back until I win the Victoria Cross.”

Out of uniform and back in Canada following the end of the Second World War, Prince faced the prejudice and racism that was the lot of most First Nations members. He divorced his first wife, his father died, and finding work was difficult even after he moved from Brokenhead to Winnipeg, where he worked as a janitor before starting his own cleaning business.

At the end of 1946, he was asked by the Manitoba Indian Association to serve as vice-president and chief spokesman, hoping his reputation as a war hero might prove helpful when dealing with federal officials on the Special Parliamentary Joint Committee formed in 1947 to examine the Indian Act. Prince, however, didn’t enjoy the machinations of politics, and left Ottawa for Winnipeg, where he worked as a lumberjack and in both a cement plant and pulp-and-paper mill.

He re-enlisted in 1950 when the government announced it was looking for forces to serve in Korea. “I owed something to my friends who died” in the Second World War, he explained of his decision to return to combat duty.



Tommy Prince, right, and his brother Morris at Buckingham Palace in 1945, where the former was presented his Military Medal and Silver Star.

“Prince,” wrote historian Robert Hepenstall, “belonged to the 10 per cent of the battalion who were really competent in battle. Prince was an excellent man in the field, but the demons that lurked within his personality rendered him useless in garrison. Eventually, the demons would tear him apart and kill him; but not in war. Some people are indestructible in war. Prince was one of them.”

On Christmas Eve in 1952, during his second tour in Korea, the accumulated stress finally got to Prince, who suffered a breakdown while on a recon patrol during which he and the men in his command were shelled by Chinese mortar bombs. Prince was moved to administrative duty and spent several weeks in early 1953 in hospital.

He returned to Canada and continued to serve at a personnel depot in Winnipeg, until he was honourably discharged in September 1954. Although he was never assessed or diagnosed, Prince most certainly suffered from PTSD.

His search for odd jobs in Winnipeg continued to reveal systemic racism. He and his common-law wife, Verna Sinclair, had five children and moved back and forth between Winnipeg and Brokenhead. They separated in 1964, their children placed in foster homes. The arthritis in Prince’s knee worsened and he had difficulty sleeping as he increasingly turned to alcohol for relief.

By the mid 1970s, he was living at the Salvation Army in Winnipeg, in a six-by-eight-foot room. His only possessions were newspaper clippings of honours he had received. According to a 1976 newspaper article in the Winnipeg Free Press, Prince had kicked his alcohol habit, but “his final years were spent reliving the terror of the two wars, and every night his bed was wet from tears and sweat.”

Tommy Prince died at Winnipeg’s Deer Lodge Centre on Nov. 25, 1977, at the age of 62. He has since been commemorated on a coin, a plaque and various murals. A statue of him sits in a park on the Brokenhead Reserve, near one of his great-great grandfather and streets in Winnipeg and Calgary, and a school in Manitoba, were named after him. The Canadian Forces have immortalized Prince at various sites, including the Tommy Prince barracks at Garrison Petawawa and the Tommy Prince Drill Hall in Wainwright, Alta. In

2000, the Sergeant Tommy Prince Army Training Initiative was established to encourage Indigenous recruitment.

That same year, his medals turned up at auction in London, Ont., and through donations from various groups and individuals, were purchased for $75,000 and given to his family. In 2001, they were placed on permanent display in the Manitoba Museum.

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Canadian Encyclopedia Article:

Tommy Prince: War Hero

Article by Laura Neilson Bonikowsky

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German soldiers on the front line near Anzio, Italy, thought little of the peasant farmer weeding his field near their emplacement. The field had been torn up by shelling, the crops all but gone. The soldiers watched disinterestedly as the farmer slowly worked his way along the field, stopping once to tie his shoelaces. Finally, the farmer stopped his work, shook his fist at the Germans and then the Allies, and returned slowly to the farmhouse.

The seemingly innocuous farmer was actually a highly-trained Canadian soldier, a marksman and an expert at tracking and making his way unseen around the enemy. His name was Thomas George (Tommy) Prince and he'd gained many of his skills growing up on the Brokenhead Ojibway Nation reserve, north of Winnipeg.

For Tommy, like most young men on Canadian reserves, World War II meant the chance for a job and three square meals a day. However, Indigenous people were routinely rejected, for health reasons but also because of their race. Tommy was turned down several times, despite more than meeting the requirements for recruitment. He persisted and was finally accepted on June 3, 1940. He was assigned to the 1st Field Park Company of the Royal Canadian Engineers. He accepted every challenge that came his way and excelled as a soldier.



Tommy Prince is Canada's most-decorated Aboriginal war veteran.

By 1942 Tommy was a Sergeant with the Canadian Parachute Battalion. He was posted to the 1st Canadian Special Service Battalion and was among a select group of Canadian soldiers sent to train with an American unit to form a specialized 1600-man assault team. They became the 1st Special Service Force (1st SSF), known to the enemy as the "Devil's Brigade." The name was adopted by Hollywood as the title of a 1968 portrayal of the elite unit. Tommy was portrayed as "Chief."

The 1st SSF soon saw action. In Italy, Tommy volunteered to run a communications line 1400 m to an abandoned farmhouse less than 200 m from a German artillery emplacement. Tommy set up his observation post in the farmhouse and for three days reported on the activity in the German camp.

On February 8, 1944, shelling severed the wire. Tommy, disguised as a farmer, found and repaired the break in full view of the enemy, while pretending to tie his shoes. His courage resulted in the destruction of four German tanks that had been firing on Allied troops. He was awarded the Military Medal for "exceptional bravery in the field."

Tommy continued to distinguish himself. In the summer of 1944, the 1st SSF entered Southern France. Tommy walked 70 km across rugged, mountainous terrain deep behind German lines near L'Escarene, going 72 hours without

food or water, to locate an enemy bivouac area. He reported back to his unit and led the brigade to the encampment, resulting in the capture of over 1000 German soldiers. He earned the Silver Star, an American decoration for gallantry in action, as well as six service medals. Tommy was honorably discharged on June 15, 1945 and went home to Canada.

Tommy returned from fighting Nazi racism to a country that denied him the right to vote in federal elections and refused him the same benefits as other Canadian veterans. The business he'd entrusted to a friend failed in his absence. Facing unemployment and discrimination, Tommy re-enlisted and served with the Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry. During two tours of duty in the Korean War he won the Korean, Canadian Volunteer Service and United Nations Service medals. He was wounded in the knee, and was honourably discharged on October 28, 1953.

Tommy Prince is known as Canada's most-decorated Indigenous war veteran. He was also a brave and remarkable man with an impish sense of humour, a man who beat his own demons, including alcoholism. Tommy had a strong sense of civic duty and a fierce pride in his people. He said "All my life 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." He dedicated himself to attaining increased educational and economic opportunities for Indigenous peoples.

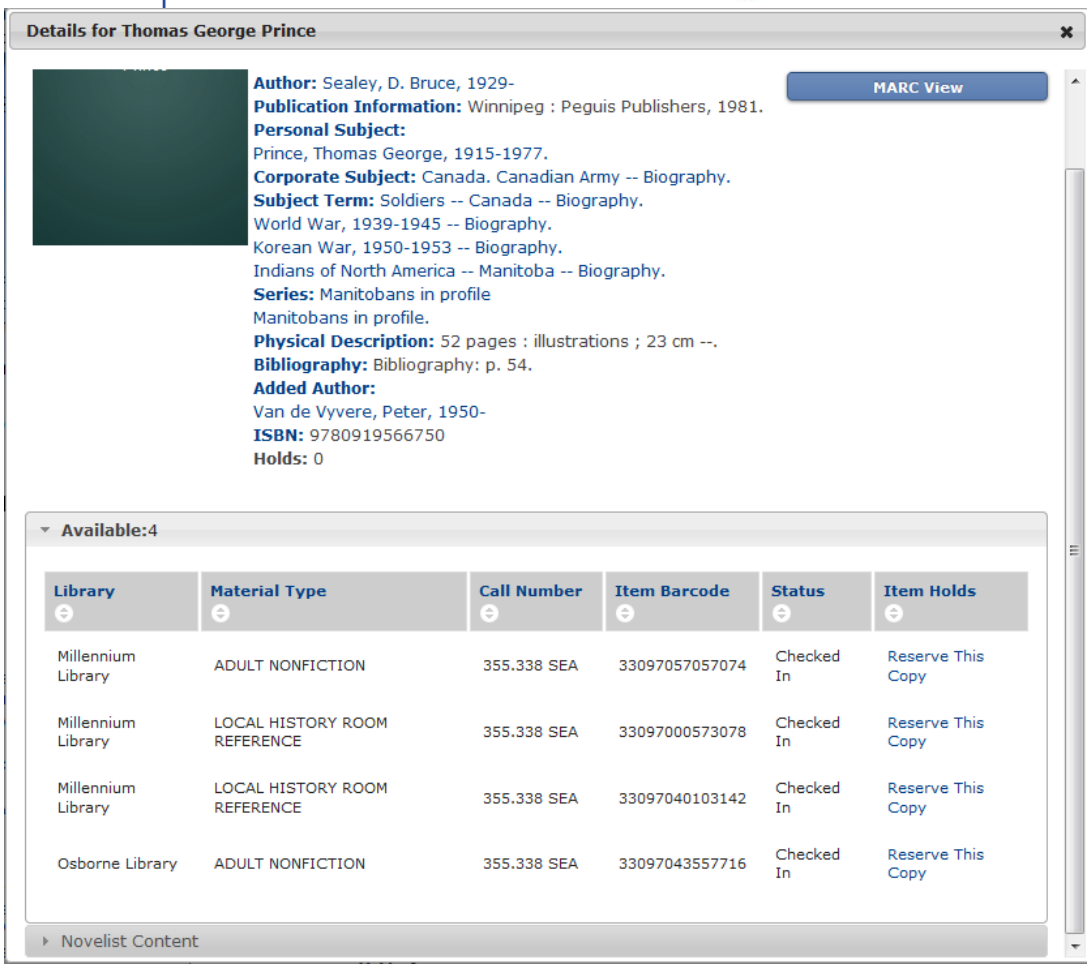
Tommy died on November 25, 1977, at the age of 62.

Featured in this blog post:

https://www.badassoftheweek.com/prince?rq=tommy

Tommy Prince: Warrior - Canadian Military History paper

http://journals.ufv.ca/jhb/Volume_1/Volume_1_Lackenbauer.pdf



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Novelist Content

A letter to the editor in the Winnipeg Free Press (July 8, 1980, p. 8) from Sealey asks for veterans to write him with remembrances of Prince.

LAC



MIKAN 3629543 Full size (6/30)

Le Sergent Tommy Prince (à droite), M.M. Médaille militaire, 1er bataillon de parachutistes canadiens, en compagnie de son frère, le Soldat Morris Prince, à une cérémonie d'investiture au palais de Buckingham. 12 février 1945 [43 KB]



MIKAN 3629541Recipients Awarded (7/3

Full size Military Medalat Buckingham

Palace Investiture Ceremony (from left to right: Corporal WA Chergwin, Sergeant Tommy Prince) Medal Recipients Received at Inauguration Ceremony at Buckingham Palace (from left to right: Corporal WA Chergwin, Sergeant Tommy Prince) February 12, 1945 [34 KB]



MIKAN 3629542 Full size (4/30

Lieutenant-Colonel Akehurst examines the military medal awarded to Sergeant Tommy Prince at an inauguration ceremony at Buckingham Palace. . February 12, 1945 [36 KB]