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Tommy Prince: A Hero

World War II just broke out. I got a call from my old elite team in February, 1944. I then met up with an old friend, Tommy Prince. Tommy and I were sent to Europe as a sniper team. We both got letters in the mail asking for North America's best two snipers. They needed us to snipe out as many as we could rather than put ourselves on the front line. It was a dangerous mission. We volunteered to run a 1500 radio wire into enemy lines. Tommy was chosen to run the line and I was chosen to cover him with my elite sniping skills. Everything was going just fine until the enemy opened fire. I was ordered not to shoot unless Tommy came under fire. The radio wire was shot. Tommy then dressed up as a farmer and went out to suck all the Italians out of their bunkers. Once I had clear shots I gave him the signal to fix the wire. After we returned from our successful mission our Battalion was ordered to head through a Riviera where Germans were heavily guarding their bunkers, waiting with anticipation, because they knew that we were coming.

We were ordered to break through the first line and clear the way for reinforcements, so we decided to make some fun with the intention of releasing some of the stress between Tommy and I. We made a bet with each other to see who would get the most kills. Tommy was fast and accurate. He was so fast by the time I fired off two shots I heard his gun go off at least six to seven times. The Germans then pulled back, fearing they were outnumbered. When Tommy and I went in the deserted camp we came face to face with our allies, the French, who were apparently standing by also waiting to attack the Germans. He asked us how many people were in our platoon to scare the Germans that bad. I then pointed to Tommy and said "There is just us."

We knew we had to carry onward if we were going to take over the land. We were hungry and thirsty, we hadn't had any food or sleep for seventy- two hours. We engaged in two battles and covered over seventy km on foot.

Prince and I were later sent to England. While in England the war in Europe ended. When the war ended Tommy and I were sent to peace keep in two different countries. Tommy was sent west while I was sent east. I didn't hear from Tommy; but, I was told he was honorably discharged on June 15, 1945. I was discharged about a month later, on July 28, 1945. Years later I saw Tommy in Winnipeg at a small time bar. He had a small business and he drank heavily all the time. I drank a lot too; because the shell shock was heavy from that war. I thought how lucky Tommy and I only were to get away from it with only some bad memories. Tommy and I had a few drinks together but I wasn't there to visit. I was there to apply for a job so I said goodbye and was on my way.

From time to time I would hear little tid-bits about Tommy and others I served with in the war. Some years later I heard that Tommy was a heavy alcoholic and he lost his wife and kids because of it, I decided to go and pay him a visit. When I arrived I started talking to him about his drinking and told him to get help. He just blew me off and kicked me out of his house. But I must have gotten through to him a bit because I got a call from him about two months later and he needed help. I grabbed my jacket jumped into my car and drove over to his house. When I arrived at his house he wasn't home, so I went looking for him at his home reserve; but I still couldn't find him. I had to leave without seeing him; because, no one knew where he was and I couldn't find him anywhere.

Tommy ended up developing arthritis in his knees as a result of the long, harsh conditions while serving in the war, and he really couldn't do much any more, since he drank so much.

In June, 1955 Tommy Prince saved a man from drowning at the Alexander Docks in Winnipeg. He was on the news but alcohol still got the best of him. He eventually had to live in Salvation Army lodges because he lost everything that he had. He even sold off his medals for some extra money. Tommy called me up one day and told me he was feeling sick and wanted to go to the hospital. He never got better. He died in Deer Lodge hospital. Tommy's body now lies in Brookside Cemetery in Winnipeg. Since his passing there are many places that have named their residents after him like schools, streets and more. Tommy Prince, the best First Nation sniper, was honored for his loyalty and courage; but no matter how much he was honored and no matter how many medals he got he never recovered from the war. A man, no matter how good, can never be the same after a war. The killing that comes out of a war destroys a part of a man that cannot be explained. Tommy was a human being with feelings that were damaged and that affected him for the rest of his life. Tommy Prince is still remembered and admired by many First Nations People. I am one of his biggest fans, not for him killing so many men, but for his skill and his courage. Even though Tommy died long before I was born, I still mourn his death.