

Robert Joseph Pruden

Born

September 9, 1949, St. Paul, Minnesota

Entered Service

Minneapolis, Minnesota

Branch

Army

Conflict

Vietnam War

Died

November 20, 1969, Quang Ngai Province,

Republic of Vietnam

Buried in Fort Snelling National Cemetery,

Minneapolis, Minnesota



Early Years

Robert Joseph Pruden, son of Lawrence and Marlys (Gitzen) Pruden, was born in St. Paul, Minnesota, on September 9, 1949. He was the second-oldest in a family of 13 children.¹ He enjoyed sports and played baseball, football and hockey.²

He graduated from Harding High School in 1967 and aspired “to make a difference in Vietnam.”³ He enlisted in the U.S. Army.

Vietnam War

Robert completed the Non-Commissioned Officer Indoctrination Course at Harmony Church, Fort Benning, Georgia, in Class 2-69, 72nd Company, graduating on 8 October 1968. He then completed Ranger training at Fort Benning and Dahlonaga, Georgia, before reporting for duty with G/75th Infantry (Rangers).⁴

In November 1969 at the age of 20, Staff Sergeant Pruden was on a reconnaissance mission with the 75th Ranger Infantry Regiment (Airborne), Americal Division. Under threat in enemy territory, he left his concealed position to divert attention from his five team members. Suffering several gunshot wounds, Pruden directed his team to an evacuation helicopter before he died from his injuries.⁵

For his actions, Robert was awarded the Medal of Honor. The citation reads:

For conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity in action at the risk of his life above and beyond the call of duty. S/Sgt. Pruden, Company G, distinguished himself while serving as a reconnaissance team leader during an ambush mission. The 6-man team was inserted by helicopter into enemy controlled territory to establish an ambush position and to obtain information concerning enemy

movements. As the team moved into the preplanned area, S/Sgt. Pruden deployed his men into 2 groups on opposite sides of a well used trail. As the group were establishing their defensive positions, 1 member of the team was trapped in the open by the heavy fire from an enemy squad. Realizing that the ambush position had been compromised, S/Sgt. Pruden directed his team to open fire on the enemy force. Immediately, the team came under heavy fire from a second enemy element. S/Sgt. Pruden, with full knowledge of the extreme danger involved, left his concealed position and, firing as he ran, advanced toward the enemy to draw the hostile fire. He was seriously wounded twice but continued his attack until he fell for a third time in front of the enemy positions. S/Sgt. Pruden's actions resulted in several enemy casualties and withdrawal of the remaining enemy force. Although grievously wounded, he directed his me into defensive position and called for evacuation helicopters, which safely withdrew the members of the team. S/Sgt. Pruden's outstanding courage, selfless concern for the welfare of his men, and intrepidity in action at the cost of his life were in keeping with the highest tradition of the military service and reflect great credit upon himself, his Unit, and the United States Army. ⁶

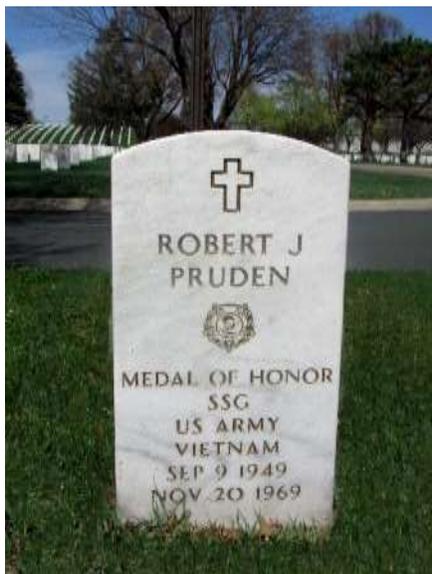
On April 22, 1971, President Richard Nixon awarded the Medal of Honor to Robert's family. His mother, father, five brothers and seven sisters were present at the private ceremony in the White House Blue Room.⁷

In addition to the Medal of Honor, Robert was awarded a Bronze Star and two Purple Hearts. He was an inaugural inductee to the U.S. Army Ranger Hall of Fame at Fort Benning, GA; the Army Rangers award the Pruden Trophy to the winner of its annual fitness challenge. Pruden Hall at Kelly Barracks, a U.S. military installation in Germany, is also named after him.⁸

Gravestone

Robert is buried at Fort Snelling National Cemetery in Minneapolis, Minnesota.

Submitted by Georgetta "Gigi" Hickey
Lake Minnetonka Chapter DAR



SOURCES

Ben Bartenstein, "St. Paul East Side police herald fallen Vietnam War soldier," St. Paul Pioneer Press, July 5, 2015, <http://www.twincities.com/2015/07/05/st-paul-east-side-police-herald-fallen-vietnam-war-soldier/> (accessed June 3, 2016)

Charles W. Bailey, "2 state GIs posthumously cited for heroic service," Minneapolis Tribune, April 23, 1971, page 14A.

"Genealogy home page for Lawrence [sic] Gilbert Pruden," <http://www.genealogy.com/ftm/p/r/u/Paul-Douglas-Pruden-Iowa/WEBSITE-0001/UHP-0171.html> (accessed June 3, 2016)

"The Virtual Wall," Vietnam Veterans Memorial Wall, <http://www.virtualwall.org/dp/PrudenRJO1a.htm> (accessed June 3, 2016)

U.S. Army Center of Military History, Medal of Honor Recipients, Vietnam War, <http://www.history.army.mil/moh/vietnam-m-z.html#PRUDEN> (accessed June 3, 2016)

"Wall of Faces," Vietnam Veterans Memorial Wall, <http://www.vvmf.org/Wall-of-Faces/41826/ROBERT-J-PRUDEN> (accessed June 3, 2016)

Bio photo taken from "Wall of Faces."

Gravestone photos from Findagrave (Front by Christina, Reverse by Devon)
<http://www.findagrave.com/cgi-bin/fg.cgi?page=mr&MRid=46772328>

ENDNOTES

¹ "Genealogy home page for Lawrence [sic] Gilbert Pruden," <http://www.genealogy.com/ftm/p/r/u/Paul-Douglas-Pruden-Iowa/WEBSITE-0001/UHP-0171.html>.

² Bob Wiltse, as quoted at "Wall of Faces," Vietnam Veterans Memorial Wall, <http://www.vvmf.org/Wall-of-Faces/41826/ROBERT-J-PRUDEN>.

³ Bob Wiltse, as quoted by Ben Bartenstein, "St. Paul East Side police herald fallen Vietnam War soldier," St. Paul Pioneer Press, July 5, 2015, <http://www.twincities.com/2015/07/05/st-paul-east-side-police-herald-fallen-vietnam-war-soldier/>.

⁴ "The Virtual Wall," Vietnam Veterans Memorial Wall, <http://www.virtualwall.org/dp/PrudenRJO1a.htm>

⁵ Ben Bartenstein, "St Paul East Side police herald..."

⁶ U.S. Army Center of Military History, Medal of Honor Recipients, Vietnam War, <http://www.history.army.mil/moh/vietnam-m-z.html#PRUDEN>.

⁷ Charles W. Bailey, "2 state GIs posthumously cited..."

⁸ Ben Bartenstein, "St Paul East Side police herald..."