

accounted for several that day in the fall of 1969 in I Corps."

### Above and Beyond

Americal LRRPs came from all walks of life and the reason for their assignments to the division LRRPs were as varied as the men themselves. Danny Jacks entered the Army on December 29, 1968 from Pine Bluff, Arkansas and took his Basic and AIT training at Fort Polk, Louisiana, then jump school at Ft. Benning. From there he volunteered for Vietnam, arriving in Chu Lai in April 1969. At Chu Lai he was asked "if anyone wants to join the Rangers?" and he volunteered, spending three weeks in Chu Lai then selected, with two others, for Recondo training at Nha Trang with the 5<sup>th</sup> Special Forces. When he returned to Chu Lai he and another soldier were assigned to a LRRP team with the 11<sup>th</sup> Brigade in Duc Pho which needed men.

Jacks recalls, "I had a stuttering problem and a southern drawl. I met my team leader; Bob Pruden and the whole team started harassing me led by Pruden. I had had enough so I kicked the table over and challenged those Yankees on the team to take me on. Pruden said, 'damn boy, you have some juice in your blood' and from that point on we were the best of friends".

Staff Sergeant Robert Pruden's Team Oregon ranged far and wide on missions for the 11<sup>th</sup> brigade. Most missions were of a reconnaissance nature but as Jacks recalls, "we became famous for grabbing prisoners. It started as a lark with me, just to show them I could do anything a damn Yankee could do. We developed techniques for grabbing prisoners and we thrived on that, it gave us an adrenaline high." Jacks continues, "the longer we were there in the Brigade the more we were pushed for a body count, so we would set a an ambush on the last day of our patrol but if the situation allowed, we tried to grab a prisoner as well."

November 29, 1969 remains etched on Danny Jacks mind. "We had been in this particular area for a few days before and had seen a lot of activity. We were sent back to set up an ambush. It wasn't a good place for an ambush. There were some dried up rice paddies and a high-speed trail about 10 yards away. Pruden split the team about ten yards apart just off the trail. Whatever direction the NVA would come from, the second team they passed would blow the ambush. We had a new guy who was not with us long and he was taking too long to set up his claymores. He was still setting them up while we were getting hunkered down when twelve NVA came out of the jungle and caught him in the open. They opened up on him and pinned him down.

"We were all dumbfounded by what was taking place but Pruden reacted immediately.



**SSG Robert Pruden's Team Oregon (Left to Right): Jim Gromacki, John Schultz, Robert Kalaway, Bob Pruden (MOH), Danny Jacks, Edward Beattie (Photo courtesy of the lrrpranger.org wen site).**

He leaped over the paddy berm to draw their attention, then he charged the NVA hollering and screaming. He was hit, went to his knees, then charged again and went down a second time. He looked at me and said, 'Jacks, I need you', we all came out of our trance and charged the NVA. Pruden got up and charged a third time until hit again. We killed seven of them and the rest faded into the jungle. The guy caught in the open had bullet holes all over his gear but was not hit.

"Pruden was in bad shape. He couldn't breathe. I tried to clear his throat and gave him mouth-to-mouth resuscitation. The third time I did that he coughed, his eyes popped wide open and he asked, 'did they kill the new guy?' I told him, no, he's still alive. He asked me 'Jacks, how am I?' We were scheduled to go on R&R together and I told him, 'boy, in another thirty days we are going on an R&R and having some fun'. He looked at me and said, 'Jacks, you and I have walked too many trails together, don't lie to me'. I told him, 'Pruden, you're dying'. He asked for a cigarette, a Marlboro, even though he couldn't breathe ... that is what he smoked and we smoked one together. He told me to enjoy the R&R on him. Pruden never did panic; he remained calm throughout the whole ordeal. I was crying because I was losing my best friend. The Medevac finally came in and, as we were lifting him up into the bird he said, 'tell my mother I love her', he rolled his eyes and died."

Danny Jacks became the team leader and extended his tour by six months to stay in the LRRPs. On August 16, 1970 he was badly wounded and sent home. Staff Sergeant Robert J. Pruden of St. Paul, Minnesota was posthumously awarded the Medal of Honor.

### The Men with Painted Faces

**Danny Jacks** was discharged from the Army in October 1970. After trying trapping and fishing and working on a railroad for three years, he settled on farming and raising chickens (40,000) in Rison, Arkansas with his wife of 33 years and two children.

**Stephen Johnson** left the Army in June 1970. He and his wife of 30 years, Pam, teach Special Education. He is the Editor/Publisher of the LRRP/Ranger Quarterly Newsletter and is very active in the LRRP/Ranger Association. Steve Johnson resides in Bemidji, Minnesota.

**David Moncada** left the active Army in 1971 but went into the Army Reserves in 1986, where he still serves as a First Sergeant. He is a Special Agent for the Defense Security Service in civilian life and lives in Carmichael, California.

**Ralph Tildon**, West Point Class of June 1968, remained on active duty until June 1978, when he entered the Army Reserve, retiring as a Colonel in 1998. It was Tildon who submitted the recommendation for SSG Pruden's Medal of Honor. He works for the Federal Government and lives in Herndon, Virginia.

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