



Chapter XXXI Dallas/ Fort Worth Special Forces Association



Volume 3 Issue 2

Summer 2011



Billy M Smith
Memorial Chapter



In Memoriam

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From Your President,

I hope this newsletter finds you all in good health and good spirits. Hopefully this hot dry weather and poor economy isn't getting anyone down. We have a few events coming up I would like you all to be aware of:

September. First is our Oktoberfest on the 10th of September at 5pm at the Bavarian Grill in Plano. We have our own banquet room. This is always a fun event and well attended by Chapter personnel.

October. Our next event is the Lake TEXOMA weekend where we have a number of Cabins reserved. I may have an opening if someone still wants to go. Chapter XXXII from Oklahoma is renting a number of cabins as well. We also have our own pavilion for social events up there. I'm told the Catfish start biting in October so bring some fishing gear along if you'd like. This should be a really fun weekend.

November. We are entered in the Dallas Veteran's Day Parade again. We will coordinate for a vehicle or vehicles to ride in. I have a 1950's M38A1 Jeep that I hope to have parade ready to lead our entry in the parade.

December. We will have the Chapter Christmas party (Date & Time TBD). I am open to suggestions for this event. We will also be coordinating with Dick's Last Resort for a Christmas Party for Children of Deployed Service Members. We will also host a party for our Montagnard families in the DFW area.

January will be our Business Meeting (Date, Time & Place TBD). I am open to suggestions here as well. We have no Fund Raisers scheduled at this point and am open to suggestions. Dick's Last Resort who has been a gracious host over the last few years opted to sponsor another organization this year. Vet-To-Vet is still the last Wednesday of every month except November and December when we hold it on announced dates (November is on the 16th this year and December has not been announced as of yet). I want to let the Vet-To-Vet regulars know that their service has been greatly appreciated by myself. The ones who truly appreciate your service are those unfortunate souls in the SCIU ward. You are appreciated more than you know.

As always I encourage you to persuade more folks to join the association. There are more Sfer's out there in the DFW are that need to come back into the fold of the SF brotherhood. Let's be proactive at getting them on board please.

"De Opresso Liber"
Jery Jochum

George Petrie



George Petrie



- 1 Jerry Jochum
- 2 Jim Curvan
- 3 Jim Browning
- 4 Gene Pugh
- 5 Randy Cesani
- 6 Tao Phan
- 7 Jim Scwabaugh
- 8 Jim Webb
- 9 Sam Wylie

- 10 Ben Lyons
- 11 Linda Weston
- 12 Bill Adair
- 13 Travis Mills
- 14 Fred Sebren
- 15 Brian Harless
- 16
- 17 Ba Hoang
- 18 Merle Eckles

- 19 Ty Ngo
- 20 Jim Stanford
- 21 Lowell Jones
- 22 Allen Clark
- 23 Charlie Barksdale
- 24 Martin Brady
- 25 Steve Sherman
- 26 Mike Holland
- 27 Ed Elder

- 28 Har
- 29 Mil
- 30 W.
- 31 Joh
- 32 Gu
- 33 Cla
- 34 Mil
- 35 Mil
- 36 Ma

George Petrie



28 Harvey Cox
 29 Mike O'Shea
 30 W. D. Walker
 31 John Kruse
 32 Guy Woodard III
 33 Claude Church
 34 Mike Plante
 35 Mike Edwards
 36 Mary Nuygen

37 Larry Green
 38 Jim Brandt
 39 Ray Kapps
 40 Jay Sabell
 41 Martin Bennett
 42 Jim Ames
 43 Ron Piper
 44 Dave Kidd
 45

46 Richard Hayse
 47 Mitchell
 48 Drew Martin
 49
 50
 51
 52
 53 Tha Le
 Jess Johnson behind Dave Kidd

George Petrie



George Petrie



George Petrie



*George William Petrie, Jr.,
Major, U. S. Army [Ret]
1939 ~ 2011*

A Soldier's Soldier

Memorial Day



Memorial Day



National Convention



Robert Pryor

..his eyes snapped open as a startling thought
ran through his mind:

There are not enough
Americans left to de-
fend the camp!



Looking even younger than his 20 years, a cheery Spc. 4 Robert Pryor poses in front of Camp Bunard's team house in June 1969.

Robert Pryor

“Life Has Been Good So Far”

The perfect storm brewing over Camp Bunard was about to change Robert Pryor's life forever

BY MICHAEL CHRISTY

GAZING OUT THE OPEN cargo doors of the Huey flying over Phouc Long Province, boyish-looking Specialist 4 Robert Pryor took in an endless landscape of mountains, meandering rivers and rolling hills covered with dense evergreen vegetation, bamboo thickets and triple canopy tropical broad leaf forests. The forbidding wilderness had an odd virginal beauty. It was also one of the most dangerous places in South Vietnam.

This sparsely populated highland plateau, nestled along the Cambodian border some 65 miles northeast of Saigon, had long been a North Vietnamese stronghold. Its isolation offered them a safe hideaway where food and equipment could be replenished while units rested, trained or prepared for future operations in the III Corps Tactical Zone.

Fiercely contested by government and Communist forces, several deadly battles had been fought over the region. One bloody battle took place 24 kilometers from Pryor's destination, Camp Bunard, in June 1965, when the Special Forces camp was overrun, leaving seven Americans dead and three missing.

On this late January day in 1969, Camp Bunard came from about five kilometers out. It appeared smaller than the hamlet the camp was the New Life Hamlet expected. A kilometer northwest of the village created as part of the pacification program devised by South Vietnam and its U.S. advisers.

Pryor was met by several of his new teammates of Detachment A-344 and shown around. An A-team, the Special Forces' smallest unit, ordinarily consisted of about 12 men at the time, although A-344 was undermanned. Ideally a unit had two medics, two commo sergeants, a team operations sergeant, an intelligence sergeant, two combat engineers, a detachment commanding officer, a detachment executive officer, a light weapons sergeant, a heavy weapons sergeant and sometimes an attached civil affairs/psychological operations officer. In Vietnam, few camps were ever full strength. On the ground, the camp felt even smaller than it looked from the air. As one of Bunard's combat engineers, Pryor would be responsible for keeping the buildings and defenses in good repair. Smaller meant his job would be more manageable.

When Pryor had arrived at 5th Special Forces Group Headquarters in Nha Trang shortly before Christmas 1968, he was 19 years old and had been in the Army nearly two years, mostly in the United States: basic, advance, airborne, Special Forces and Vietnamese language. Perhaps because Pryor looked more like 14 to some, it was decided that he could use some more training. After four weeks of Recondo School, Pryor was assigned to Bunard.

In his first six months there, he had seen his share of firefights, boldly faced down the enemy, received his first Purple Heart after being wounded by shrapnel fragments, and turned 20. Now, with the approach of summer, he was experiencing his first rainy season.



GROUND ZERO Carved out of the Phouc Long wilderness, Camp Bunard served as an island in the enemy's sea.

plateau, nestled along the Cambodian border some 65 miles northeast of Saigon, had long been a North Vietnamese stronghold. Its isolation offered them a safe hideaway where food and equipment could be replenished while units rested, trained or prepared for future operations in the III Corps Tactical Zone.

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Robert Pryor

Typically monsoon rains are sudden and short. But the heavy storm hitting Camp Bunard on Wednesday, June 17, 1969, had been pounding the camp for hours with no sign of letting up.

At 5:30 a.m. on the 18th, Pryor had just finished radio watch. He stood at a doorway of the windowless, concrete bunker that housed the team's tactical operations center (TOC), eyeing the huge puddle and muddy clay between him and his breakfast in the team house.

"What the hell," he mumbled as he pulled up his collar and bolted into the driving rain, through the mud field. There in seconds, he yanked open the screen door and scrambled inside.

The only people there were the camp's two Cambodian cooks, who started whipping up Pryor's breakfast as soon as he walked in. He quickly devoured his eggs, canned bacon, toast and coffee, and reached into his breast pocket for a plastic bag that held a half-empty pack of Benson & Hedges cigarettes and his Zippo. He lit up, leaned back in his chair and drew the smoke deep into his lungs. As he stared out the screen window, the rain suddenly stopped.

Pryor went out to check around the from the rain that would need repair. ed to his hooch to grab some sleep. He around 8:30 a.m. by a clamor in the hall Class Daniel Dudley, weapons sergeant, heading out on the patrol they had been commander, 1st Lt. John Parda. The Cong east of the camp. In addition to include two Vietnamese Special Forces lar Defense Group (CIDG).

Hoping to fall back asleep, Pryor rolled they suddenly snapped back open as a not enough Americans left in the camp!

Just a couple days earlier, Master Sgt. team's junior medic, left for R&R in Aus-trol, that left only four Americans to de-ese Special Forces and around 50 CIDG personnel who, more than likely, included some Viet Cong infiltrators.

Along with Pryor, the three remaining Americans at Bunard were 1st Lt. Parda, Sgt. 1st Class Carl Cramer, com-mo sergeant, and Sgt. 1st Class Charles Hinson, senior intelligence sergeant.

As he mulled over the seriousness of the situation, Pryor decided maybe it wasn't all that dire. They had three things going for them.

First, all of the Americans were seasoned warriors. Second, there had been only a few enemy contacts in the past few months. And third, security conditions were better than they had ever been since his arrival in January because two rifle companies with more than 200 men from the 1st Infantry Division were operating out of a mini fire base directly beyond Bunard's outer perimeter for nearly a month. Their patrolling provided enormous security to Bunard. Add to that the di- vision's massive firepower available to support the camp anytime it was needed. Matter of fact, Big Red One units were laced across the region as security for crews clearing away heavy vegetation along both sides of Highway 14.

So, with enemy activity near zero, plus the 1st Infantry Division carrying out much of the security mission, Pryor de- cided it wasn't as grim as he had first imagined and drifted back to sleep.

Along with the others in the camp, Pryor spent the rest of the day carrying out routine activities. While leading a crew doing minor fixes on the camp's defenses, he saw no signs of impending danger. That night, he did his routine radio watch, finally going to bed at 3 a.m., knowing all was well.

When Pryor awoke at dawn on the 19th, however, he and the other three Americans were shocked to learn that the 1st Infantry Division element next door had moved out during the night. Not one of the Americans at Bunard had been told about the planned move.

Literally overnight, having too few Americans at Camp Bunard suddenly became a problem of major consequences.

There was yet another condition unfolding at that moment that no one could have imagined. More than 100 well-armed Viet Cong were making their way through the jungle toward the camp.

A "perfect storm" of singular fury was blowing directly at the men at Camp Bunard.

AMONG THE AMERICANS in the camp, there was now a heightened sense of alertness. The rest of the day, everyone had a more critical eye on security conditions, making adjustments where needed. Late in the afternoon, Pryor and Parda went over to the abandoned 1st Infantry Division firebase to scrounge around for anything that could be used to reinforce Bu-



camp to see if there had been any damage Finding only a lot of soggy sandbags, he head- was in a deep sleep when he was awakened outside his room. He figured it was Sgt. 1st and Staff Sgt. Charles Orona, senior medic, assigned the night before by the detachment patrol's mission was to look for any signs of Viet Dudley and Orona, the three-day patrol would soldiers and 60 members of the Civilian Irregu-

over. He shut his eyes for a second or two when startling thought ran through his mind: There are

John Nowlan and Sergeant Larry Crile, the tralia. Now, with Dudley and Orona out on pa- fend the camp, along with a handful of Vietnam-

Robert Pryor

nard's defenses. They found barbed wire, heavy lumber and other construction items, but because it was getting dark they decided to return the next morning with a work party and haul it back to the camp.

Scheduled for radio watch that night from 11:30 to 1 a.m., Pryor decided to read a book he had just started rather than try to sleep. Around 11 he shoved the paperback into his side pocket, put on his web gear, secured his M-16 and headed out of the hooch.

It was his normal routine to walk the camp perimeter looking for anything out of the ordinary before reporting to the TOC. This night was pitch black. Even the waxing moon was invisible behind the low hanging clouds. All he could see were shadows and darkness, but as best he could determine nothing was amiss.

South China Sea

Pryor relieved Carl Cramer, who reported everything was quiet. The A-team patrol had reported no signs of enemy activity since they started out the day before. No messages had been received from B-Detachment headquarters at Song Be, 22 kilometers northwest of Bunard. No news was good news, especially in light of the camp's manpower shortage and the loss of its 1st Infantry Division "security blanket."

Yawning, Cramer picked up his M-16 and the letter he had written to his wife, bid Pryor "good night" and shuffled off to bed. After making sure all radios were operational, Pryor, a three-pack-a-day smoker, sat down and lit up a cigarette. He spent his two-hour radio watch finishing his paperback. Just before 1 a.m. on June 20, Charles Hinson entered the TOC ready for his radio watch. Pryor reported what Cramer had passed on to him: All was quiet. He then left for bed.

Inside his room, Pryor sat on the edge of his bunk, picked up a crumpled pack of cigarettes and his Zippo from the table, lit a cigarette and drew the smoke in. The smoke irritated his throat, and as he coughed he admonished himself, "Someday I've got to quit smoking." He reached down to unzip his jungle boots, slipped off his trousers and tossed them in a heap at the side of the bed.

Leaning back on the bed, Pryor took another drag, and again he hacked and thought to himself: "Who am I kidding? There is no way in hell I will ever quit smoking." He started to take another drag, but as he did, all hell broke loose—the world of Camp Bunard and Robert Pryor was about to be torn asunder.

In a flash, a firestorm of mortars, rocket-propelled grenades, and heavy machine gun and small-arms fire was raining down on the camp. Along the Bunard's outer perimeter, a swarm of Viet Cong sappers and soldiers were about to breach the wire.

Pryor tossed his cigarette, pulled on his trousers and boots, grabbed his M-16, a radio and his ammunition belt and bolted out the door toward his assigned mortar pit about 10 meters away. Instantly, he was met with enemy fire pouring from the outer perimeter but made it unscathed to the mortar pit, grabbed a ready-to-fire illumination round and dropped it down the 81mm tube

as fast as he could. The three rounds exploded brightly in the dark sky, casting eerie shadows throughout the camp. Two such shadows rushed to the mortar pit, startling Pryor until he saw it was the two Cambodian cooks, who were assigned to help out in case of an attack.

The three men began working in rhythm: A few illumination rounds, followed with several high-explosive (HE) rounds. The distinct "thump, thump, thump" of mortar rounds hitting the base plate gave Pryor some comfort. The HE rounds exploding outside the perimeter sounded even more reassuring.

Still the Viet Cong gained a foothold inside the outer perimeter and were moving into the inner perimeter. Fire from defenders and attackers flew back and forth in streams of green and red tracer rounds. Caught in the crossfire were about 35 women and children who lived in the camp. Standing outside the TOC, Parda saw the enemy storming into the camp. He radioed Pryor to get to the outer perimeter to try to stop the Viet Cong and get the civilians to safety.

Hearing the orders, Pryor felt certain he would be killed, but he also knew he was the one to go. His three teammates were married with children, and he didn't even have a girlfriend. How could he live with himself if Parda, Hinson or Cramer were killed? So, leaving the cooks behind to continue the mortar fire, he strapped on his radio and scurried to the operations center, where Cramer was frantically calling for fire support while Parda barked order on all fronts.

Dodging the enemy fire, Pryor raced to the TOC where he found Phan, his interpreter, and the two dashed toward the outer perimeter to confront an overwhelming force of determined Viet Cong.

Pryor and Phan had gotten to about 30 meters from the outer perimeter when the darkness ahead of them exploded into a wall of fire. Despite AK-47 and heavy machine gun bullets cracking all around them, the duo managed to safely cover the ground to the outside perimeter without being hit. Firing on the run, they moved along the outer defenses until they stumbled on the women and children cowering in small tunnel-like trenches connecting the fighting positions.

Phan yelled at the civilians to run toward the inner perimeter while Pryor provided cover. As the women and children scrambled toward safer ground, Phan fired off a burst in the direction of the Viet Cong. At that moment, an enemy mortar round exploded to their rear, knocking Pryor off his feet. Feeling around with his hand, he found shards of hot, jagged metal sticking out of his thigh. Beside him was his radio, blown apart. Turning to see how Phan had fared, he saw his mangled body, blown into pieces and scattered about.

Robert Pryor

Struggling to get up, Pryor limped forward in an attempt to stop the Viet Cong before they reached the inner perimeter. After 50 feet, a machine gun opened up on him. He aimed his M-16 at the flames bursting from the darkness, and the machine gun fell silent.

Pryor slapped another magazine into his rifle and moved ahead a few more yards, when something hot hit him in the chest, knocking him to the ground like he had been struck by a speeding bowling ball. Swiping away the blood now oozing from a chest wound, he was surprised at its wetness and stickiness.

Bullets continued to crack over his head and ripped into the dirt around him. He knew he had to find some cover, fast. Recalling a shallow trench nearby, he crawled to it safely in spite of the fire now concentrated in his direction. But the moment he got into the trench, a grenade blast sent metal fragments into his arms and legs and shattered his rifle. Despair swept over Pryor—a badly wounded man with no rifle, no radio and dozens of VC intent on killing him.

CROUCHING AS LOW as he could in the trench, lets pierce the darkness and could feel a number lower abdomen. His knees, thighs and left calf muscle in his forearm and blew off part of his

Lying in the dirt, now completely helpless, nearby and expected to be finished off with a bullet heard the reassuring voice of one of the camp's

At that instant, the enemy fire grew to a crescendo. A bullet penetrated the base of his neck. Now his side, blood spurting from a bullet hole in

Trying to gauge the extent of his own could reach. He felt blood oozing out of his to his head. Blood and brain tissue met his seous from the pungent odor of his own blood.

Amid the clamor raging about him and the tinguish the M-16s firing from the inner perim-an exploded illumination round drifting to "But what does it matter, really? I'm a dead

As he began to lose consciousness, he also they real? He struggled mightily to fend off the stronger, closer. It was Hinson's voice, calling "Over here!"

In spite of the deafening gunfire and explosion, immediately giving him morphine while Pryor knew nothing could have been further from gash in his chest, neck and the four head wounds in front of him went white. "So," he thought, "this

Although also wounded, Hinson somehow car-bunker, with bullets, satchel charges and mortar dropped Pryor because of the slipperiness from

Finally, Hinson pulled Pryor into the bunker, off what was left of his clothes to find the wounds raced back out of the TOC to continue the fight to

The battle had been raging for 30 minutes when a pair of gun-ships arrived, dropping powerful illumination over the camp and exposing scores of Viet Cong desperately trying to hide. The gun-ships opened up with all the firepower they had. Some VC fell in-

stantly dead, others were wounded. The survivors ran to take refuge in the abandoned 1 st Infantry Division camp, from where they continued to fire on Camp Bunard. The gunships shifted to the Viet Cong's new position and let go with rockets and mini-gun fire and were joined by more gunships.

Meanwhile, inside the operations bunker, Pryor was in a deep coma, his condition worsening with each labored breath. Parda had little success in stopping the bleeding. He cursed the absence of the team's two medics from the camp. Thank God, Parda thought, a medevac helicopter was inbound, but would it be soon enough?



TRUE GRIT Pryor's rescuer, Charles Hinson, just days before the Viet Cong assault.

Pryor watched green tracers from enemy bul-pierce his body. Multiple rounds raked his were hit. It was a B-40 rocket that tore off the skull.

Pryor could sense the presence of someone let in the head at any second. But instead, he Cambodian medics.

scendo and Pryor felt a heavy tug at his throat. he could barely breathe and realized that the Raising his head, he saw the dying medic at his head.

wounds, Pryor searched the body parts he legs, chest, arms and stomach. He reached up touch. Shivering from the pain, he grew nau-

searing pain inside him, Pryor could still dis-eter and see friendly tracers. Overhead he saw earth. "Thank God, I'm not alone," he thought. man."

began to hear English-speaking voices. Were fog closing in on his mind as the voices grew his name. Somehow Pryor got out a muffled,

sions, Hinson heard Pryor's cry and raced to assuring him he was going to be all right. But the truth as he felt himself growing cold. The were bleeding profusely. Suddenly, the world is how it ends?"

ried and dragged Pryor back to the command rounds chasing him every step. Twice he his many bleeding wounds.

and Parda helped lay him in a corner and cut and attempt to stem the bleeding. Hinson secure the outer perimeter.

Robert Pryor

Bleeding profusely,
suddenly the world in front of him
went white and Pryor thought:
So this is how it ends?



MORNING AFTER As dawn breaks on June 20, much of Camp Bunard is smoldering ruins, while in an operating room some 60 miles away, another battle is underway as doctors straggle to save the life of Robert Pryor.

Robert Pryor

Parda yelled at Cramer for an update on the dust-off. "About five minutes out," responded Cramer. Parda prayed the medevac would get there sooner. He feared Pryor would be dead in minutes, maybe even seconds.

With the sound of a dust-off approaching, Cramer radioed the pilot that the situation had become desperate: Pryor was fading fast. The pilot did not respond with the same urgency, telling Cramer he would not risk losing his crew and helicopter by landing in the camp while it was still under enemy fire. Parda grabbed the radio and begged him to please land: "There is only sporadic enemy fire, and my man is nearly dead!"

Seconds later, another medevac came on station. The pilot had heard the exchange between Cramer and the other medevac. He said he and his crew would attempt a rescue and asked for ground guidance on where to land. Cramer told him it needed to be inside the perimeter, as the camp's helipad was in direct sight of enemy fire. "The only suitable place to land is a very tight fit between buildings with antennas and guide wires in every direction," Cramer warned. The pilot calmly requested an azimuth on which to vector in.

Hinson, who had returned to the TOC, threw a PRC-25 and moved to the area selected for the improvised helipad. of the hovering medevac, Hinson radioed the pilot the in on his flashlight.

Slowly and carefully the pilot guided the aircraft down, fuselage. Hinson warned the pilot that he was dangerously Hinson that he was now too close to an opposite building

After several more adjustments called out by Hinson, the gently to the ground, its nose six inches from where Hinson surrounding obstacles.

Parda and Cramer rushed the stretcher holding Pryor's chief and medic, who pulled him up and onto the cargo Pryor would not survive.

The pilot lifted off with the same care to clear the obsta- directly southwest to the 24th Evacuation Hospital at Long board jammed a transfusion needle into his arm and tried to

It took 45 minutes to reach the hospital, where a medical Pryor's blood-soaked stretcher and lowered it into the wait-

Loosely secured to a gurney, Pryor was raced into the when the gurney disappeared into the hospital did they lift

CLINGING TO LIFE, the 20-year-old was met by several gen, IVs, blood transfusions and anything else to keep serious wounds and nearly 200 other wounds they counted upper rib cage were fractured by the bullet that ripped into heart; bullets and fragments of shrapnel were found every-two head wounds that had blown away 20 percent of the

The valiant struggle to save the young soldier's life the fearless medevac crew, no one at the 24th Evac- Miraculously, Pryor did not die on the operating dures in the week ahead to keep him alive. The last on June 26. A total of seven gallons of blood had been from his deep coma.

On Pryor's 30th day in the hospital, July 20, because of his brain injuries, but he could hear.

while a newsman was announcing on television that the Apollo 11 spacecraft had just landed on the moon. With Pryor struggling to listen, Neil Armstrong proclaimed to the world watching in awe: "Houston, Tranquility Base here. The Eagle has landed."

The first words Pryor heard after 30 days in a coma were among the most historic of all human history.

For his extraordinary courage that night in battle, Robert Pryor was awarded the Distinguished Service Cross, the nation's second highest award for valor. Charles Hinson and Carl Cramer received Silver Stars. John Parda was presented a Bronze Star Medal with "V" device for valor.

Pryor spent nearly four months recuperating at the 24th Evacuation Hospital at Long Binh, the 249th General Hospital at Camp Drake in Japan, and Travis Air Force Base in California. He then went to the Presidio of San Francisco's Letterman Army Hospital for rehabilitation and some further procedures. On October 13, 1969, he was sent home on terminal leave with 100 percent disability.



radio over his shoulder, grabbed a flashlight and a compass Casting a filtered red light into the darkness toward the sound proper azimuth, telling him to bring the nose of the helicopter

even as several enemy bullets slammed holes in the chopper's close to a building. The pilot adjusted, only to be told by and a 30-foot antenna.

pilot squeezed between the structures. The chopper settled was standing, with three feet between the rotor blades and the

motionless body to the medevac and lifted him up to the crew floor. While no one would say it, each man's face showed it:

cles he had taken when landing, pulled power and headed Binh. In the cargo bay, Pryor did not stir when the medic on stop the bleeding.

crew was already waiting. The crew chief and medic lifted ing arms of two medics. emergency room. The pilot and the crew watched, and only off into the darkness.

scrubbed doctors and nurses who leapt into action with oxy-Pryor breathing. It was a very tall task considering the 30 on his body. Pryor's bladder was ruptured; his clavicle and his neck; the bullet that tore into his chest barely missed his where, in his torso, legs, arms and head. Most serious were right side of his brain.

went on for 23 hours. Like his comrades at Camp Bunard and uation Hospital was willing to give up on him.

table. However, it took several more operations and proce- procedure, a secondary closure of his head wounds, was done pumped into his veins, and through it all he never emerged

1969, he gradually regained consciousness. He could not see As he came to, he could hear excited voices all around him

Robert Pryor

And, Robert Pryor also quit smoking. His last cigarette was the one he lit up just moments before the perfect storm swept across Camp Bu-nard. ■&

Michael Christy served two tours in Vietnam, first on a Special Forces A-Team and later with Project Delta's 81st Airborne/Ranger Battalion. A film and television documentary writer and producer, his work appears on the History Channel, A & E and other networks.

No one uttered what each man's face showed: Pryor would not survive

DÉJÀ VU Striking the same pose in 2000 as they did in June 1969, Robert Pryor (center) is joined by Detachment A-344 team mates (from left) Charles Hinson, Carl Cramer, Dan Dudley, John Parda, Larry Crile and John Nowlan.



Robert Pryor

The re-making of A Wonderful Life

IT WAS ROBERT PRYOR'S courage on the battlefield that earned him a place in the pantheon of American war heroes. His bravery at Camp Bunard in 1969 also produced wounds so severe he has suffered a lifetime of physical pain and mental uncertainty.

He suffers from chronic pain in every part of his body, some of it created by the many shrapnel fragments that have never been removed. One leg was so shattered, he wore a brace until 2005.

The head wounds that took out nearly a quarter of his brain caused memory loss and cognitive problems. It also left him with an extremely rare and compelling disorder called Prosopagnosia or "face blindness." Pryor has difficulty recognizing close friends and family members, including his wife and children. He cannot even recognize his own face in the mirror or in photographs.

But during those dark, uncertain days he lay incapacitated in the 24th Evacuation Hospital at Long Binh, Pryor made a vow: He would never be defined by his disabilities. While in physical therapy, Pryor pushed hard to gain greater and faster results. Forty years later, despite constant physical pain, he remains physically fit through a regimen of scuba, physical training, biking, hiking and long walks.

Long active in civic affairs, Pryor was a two-term Stanwood, Wash., city councilman, and for a decade he was head of a district water board. He toiled in the fields of his own commercial farm for 17 years before he sold it 2003 when he went back to college. In spite of his brain injuries, he graduated summa cum laude from Washington State University in 2006.

With his own daughter, son and a stepdaughter, he has also fostered 15 children, five of whom he adopted. He now lives in Fort Collins, Colo., with his wife and family.

Forty years ago, Robert Pryor made a pledge to live a full and productive life in spite of the many physical and emotional challenges he faced from that bad night at Camp Bunard. Instead of standing on the sidelines and complaining, he jumped into the game of life by choosing a path of "what is and what can be, rather than a dead-end street of what isn't and what can never be."

Perhaps Robert Pryor's ability to succeed can be summed up by how he signs off on his e-mails: "Life has been good so far..." M.C.

**Robert Pryor is a member of Chapter 31 SFA
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