

P.407645/43/P.4./108.

AIR MINISTRY  
Casualty Branch,  
73-77 Oxford Street,  
London, W.1.

26th January, 1944.

Dear Mrs. Todd-White,

You will remember a letter dated 7th January, 1944, from the Air Ministry telling you that all efforts to trace your husband, Squadron Leader R.N. Todd-White, had proved unavailing.

We have now had a report which bears on the mystery of his fate. This report is unfortunately of a very grievous nature. I have no alternative, however, but to pass it on to you.

It appears that on 5th December, 1943, the body of an unidentified member of the Royal Air Force was found at the fishing village of Klase, in the parish of Sproge, on the Island of Gotland, Sweden.

The only clues to identify were -

a pilot's brevet,

A shoulder-strap with Squadron Leader's stripes,

a cigarette case said to bear the initials R.I.W. on the face and the inscription "To Dick from Pixie Aug. 1937" on the inside, and

a spectacle case with the maker's name - Leader & Kruesch Limited. Grahamstown.

The report adds that the unknown, who was believed to be a South African (apparently on the evidence of the spectacle case), was buried with full military honours at Sproge on 22nd December, 1943. I enclose a precis translation of an article in the Gotlands Allehanda of 23rd December, 1943.

For some days our efforts to identify the Squadron Leader were frustrated by the misleading clue, R.I.W. We could not find a Squadron Leader with the initials R.I.W. or any variant of those three letters. Yesterday, however, the actual relics reached this branch, and it was found that the initials were not R.I.W. but R.T-W, with a hyphen between the T. and the W.

This led us, without much further difficulty, to Squadron Leader Richard Nevil Todd-White, though, even now, the second initial (N) was not on the cigarette case. Our conjecture that it was indeed your husband was strengthened by the remembrance that you formerly lived at Grahamstown and that the glasses might well have been bought there.

To make the identification absolutely certain, will you be kind enough to say if you gave your husband a silver cigarette case with the initials R. T-W on the outside and the inscription "To Dick from Pixie" inside.

If you can furnish this confirmation, we shall be able to reclassify your husband as killed in action. We shall also have to ask the Swedish authorities, through diplomatic channels, to see that the grave is properly inscribed.

The silver cigarette case and other relics are, of course, at your disposal, if you would like to have them, but I must warn you that they are not in good condition and I do not want to add to your distress by handing them over without this warning.

If you care to call at this Branch, we can talk over the case, and I can at the same time, if you so desire, give you the cigarette case and other things.

May I conclude by offering you our sympathy in your prolonged distress and anxiety. Yours sincerely, (Sgd) A.P. Le M. Sinkinson.  
(Flight Lieutenant in Casualty Bdn.)

Precis translation of article in "Gotlands Allehanda" of 23rd December, 1943.

The body of an unidentified South African airman, which had floated ashore, was buried with solemn ceremony yesterday (December 22nd), at Sproge. The local inhabitants had come in hundreds and there were even people from neighbouring parishes attending the funeral.

The coffin, draped with a Union Jack, was standing in the churchyard, but the service took place in the church, which was very full. Mr. A. Gustafsson, school teacher, played funeral music on the organ and then followed the hymn "Närmare Gud till dig" (Nearer, my God, to Thee). Mr. H. Björkqvist, the vicar, preached on the text "My thoughts are not your thoughts neither are your ways my ways" (Isaiah LV, 6 - 9) and read prayers. The congregation then left the church and followed the coffin to the graveside. The coffin was carried by six soldiers, and a guard of honour fired a salute as the coffin was lowered. The vicar read the burial prayers and then the hymn "Jag är en gäst och främling" (I am a guest and stranger) was sung, which took on a special significance applied to a soldier from South Africa who had found a grave on Gotland.

Major Elof Lindeborg made a speech in English and laid a wreath with blue-and-yellow ribbon from the Military Commander on the Island of Gotland.

Konsul C.G. Björkander then made a speech, beginning in Swedish and concluding in English as follows :-

"As an official representative of the British Empire  
"I thank you for your heroic death. I bid you also a  
"grateful and sorrowing farewell from your country  
"and your government, from your home and from your  
"relations and I lay on your grave these garlands:  
"From the Ministry of the Union of South Africa,  
"Stockholm; from the Air Attaché, British Legation,  
"Stockholm, and from myself, British Vice-Consul,  
"Visby."

The South African Minister's wreath had green, white and orange ribbon, the two others red white and blue.

Members of Sproge Church Council came forward and their vice-chairman, Mr. C.N. Stenström of Botreifs, paid warm tribute to the unknown soldier and laid a wreath with blue-and-yellow ribbon from Sproge Parish.

Finally, Konsul Björkander expressed thanks on behalf of the British Legation and the relatives of the dead man for the tribute paid him.