

S/L R N Todd-White. Captain of ED805 EA-S.

Translation of Swedish text on <http://www.tjelvar.se/flyktingar/akter1/26.htm>

Born: 1 August 1918 in Leytonstone, England. His parents were Arthur Thomas and Elsie Todd-White.

Nationality: English

Rank: Squadron Leader. Pilot of the bomber Lancaster ED805.

Married to Joan "Pixie" Crane.

Found 5 December 1943 on the beach close to Klase fishing harbour in Sproge. The body was much decomposed after being in the water a long time.

He was the pilot of a Lancaster bomber. On 18 August 1943 more than 600 allied bomber aircraft attacked the V-weapon base Peenemünde on the island Usedom. S/L Todd-White flew one of these. Some 60 aircraft were lost and S/L Todd-White's Lancaster was one of these. It crashed in the Southern Baltic with the loss of the whole crew of seven. The other members of the crew were: F/O A. Batchelor navigator, Sgt T. Brocklehurst (misspelt in the website text) air gunner, Sgt G. Humble air gunner, F/O B. James wireless operator, F/O F. Plant air bomber and Sgt A. Purrington flight engineer.

He (S/L Todd-White) was exhumed in 1961 and moved to Gothenburg. He was reinterred in the CWGC cemetery Kviberg in Gothenburg in grave reference kv. 49A nr 1 (coffin).

Yesterday a new body was found in south Gotland, when another victim of the war was found just south of Klase fishing harbour at Sproge.

It was a British airman, which was obvious from the markings on the parachute harness on the body. The find was by a fisherman A Olsson from Alvegård in Sproge and the dead body was found in the water some 40 meters from the beach.

The airman had been in the water a long time and the body was very damaged in its exposed parts where no clothing had protected the body. A closer investigation has not been done at this stage, but will be carried out in the near future. (Gotlands Allehanda 6 December 1943)

The body of the British Airman found at Sproge will be interred on Sunday at 3 o'clock at Klinte cemetery.

No rank insignia has been found on the uniform of the dead body, but objects belonging to the dead man will probably give leads as to the exact identity of the deceased in due course. Among other things a cigarette case was found in the pockets of the uniform with the initials R.I.V and the words "From Dick to Pixie 1937". Also, a spectacle case was found with a company stamp from Grahamstown and is therefore from South Africa or New Zealand as both these countries have towns with this name. It is not clear if the airman comes from these Dominions or not, but it is not implausible. (Gotlands Allehanda 9 December 1943)

The body of the British Airman,

That was found near the beach of Sproge, will be interred on Sunday at 3 o'clock at Sproge cemetery and not at Klinte which was stated yesterday. Consul C. G. Björkander will represent the British Legation and lay a wreath on their behalf. (Gotlands Allehanda 10 December 1943)

The Unknown Dick from Grahamstown will be interred in Sproge

A beautiful and fitting celebration at the Unknown Soldier's grave.

A very formal act of sorrow and homage was made yesterday in Sproge, when the body of the unknown South African soldier, which had come ashore on the coast, was laid to rest. It was an unusual and moving burial. Hundreds of people from the local parish came, together with people

from neighbouring parishes, to attend the funeral service. Beautiful winter weather with sun over white fields also contributed to the humble acts of homage to the dead stranger.

“My ways are not your ways...”

The coffin draped in the British Flag was placed on a hearse in the churchyard, but the service took place in the church which was packed. A teacher from the local school A. Gustafsson was organist and first played an introduction of mourning music. Then the hymn “Nearer my God to thee” was sung. The vicar, H. Björkqvist, gave the sermon on the theme from Isaiah 55:6-9 “For My thoughts are not your thoughts neither are your ways My ways, saith the Lord” etc.

The vicar reminded the congregation in his sermon about the different fates that can befall a person. Some people may reach the highest positions, while others meet disappointment or are a disappointment. But it is God who distributes the different fates and it is the faith in him and the dedication to the assignments by him which is important. The most important is that the Lord can say at the end, “You are the good and faithful servant”.

These thoughts could also have been those of the people beside the body of an unknown soldier that floated ashore on our coast. Never had he thought that this would be his task, when he went to war or started his last flight. Nameless he shall be laid to rest and his family may never know his final resting place. Perhaps they nurture the false hope that the missing person will come back sometime or perhaps that he may be in a prison of war camp somewhere. Why has this happened? This question will never be answered for us. The conviction that what happens is for the best gives us all courage to live in this world.

Swedish Soldiers gave the last service

The vicar then said a prayer, after which the congregation left the church and assembled round the coffin before proceeding to the open grave. The coffin was carried by six soldiers with a guard of honour following. When the coffin was lowered into the grave the guard of honour fired two salvoes in honour of the deceased soldier. After this the vicar approached the grave and committed according to the Swedish Church ritual, “the unknown soldier” to his last resting place. After the committal the (Swedish) hymn “Jag är en gäst och främling” (I am a guest and stranger) was sung. The words of which took on a particular meaning when they now meant for a South African soldier who was laid to rest in a grave in the earth of Gotland.

Laying of wreaths and speeches

After this there followed the laying of wreaths in the beautiful evening. First was major Elof Lindeborg who held a speech in English and laid a wreath with blue and yellow ribbons from the Commander in Chief of Gotland. He said, yet again an unknown soldier has been laid to rest in the area of my command. During the changing events of war the fate of individuals is completely different. Dick from Grahamstown has fallen in his post in unknown conditions somewhere in the Baltic. His body has been brought over the storm ridden sea to the beach of Sproge.

“R.J.W, your aviator life is over! You have given the ultimate sacrifice. You have fought for your country, your people and your family. You have done your duty. Rest in peace. On behalf of the Commander-in-Chief of Gotland I lay this wreath as a last token of honour.”

Consul C. G. Björkander then stepped forward and laid three wreaths; one from the South African Minister in Stockholm, one from the British Air Attaché at the British Legation in Stockholm and one from himself as the British Vice-Consul in Visby.

One month ago (20 October 1943) four British Warriors landed on our island, two officers and two privates. They had escaped from a prisoner of war camp after years of imprisonment and were still in good health having regained their freedom. Today we are facing the remains of another British warrior, an unknown soldier of NCO rank (sic). He has, for reasons unknown to us, succumbed in the

fight for his country. The waves of the Baltic brought him to our coast. And friendly hands have prepared his last place of rest here in the soil of Gotland far from his home down in South Africa. But this warrior has also won the freedom of another and higher value than the aforementioned four comrades in arms. He has through his death of a hero won the freedom from all the worlds worry and troubles, freedom from the earthly temptations. And he has at the same time reached the goal that we all desire, reunion with the Lord. Peace be over his body.

“As an official representative of the British Empire I thank you for your heroic death. I bid you also a grateful and sorrowing (sic) farewell from your country and it’s Government, from your home and your relations and I lay on your grave these garlands. From the Minister of South Africa, Stockholm; from the Air Attaché, British Legation Stockholm, and from myself British Vice-Consul, Visby.”

The wreath from the Minister of South-Africa had ribbons in green, white and orange, the two others in red, blue and white.

Finally the Church Council approached the grave and its chairman, farmer C. N. Stenström, Botreif, conveyed in warm, heartfelt words praise for the unknown airman and laid a wreath with blue and yellow ribbons which was from the Parish of Sproge.

He recalled that the deceased had come from an unknown country to us. He was a soldier, he had fulfilled the order he was given and had fallen for his country. Perhaps he has parents waiting for him in vain, perhaps a wife and child. Here he has found peace after all the worry and fighting. He has also reached a better country, eternity.

Finally Consul Björkander conveyed thanks on behalf of the British Legation and the family for the honour that had been shown to the dead person. The Parish of Sproge invited everyone present to have coffee in the school house where the Women’s Auxiliary Force (translators comment: in Sweden the Women’s Voluntary organisation “Lottorna” comprises the Army, Air Force and Navy) had made the arrangements. Consul Björkander and the vicar Björkqvist again thanked the parishioners of Sproge for the sacrifices they had made in order to make the solemn occasion so beautiful and dignified. (Gotlands Allehanda 13 December 1943).

The Unknown Soldier in Sproge cemetery is identified.

The family recognised the items (found on the body)

After some time, the identity of the “unknown Dick from Grahamstown” has been discovered. That of British airman who was interred at Christmas in Sproge cemetery, after his body was found by a fisherman on the beach at Sproge. A cigarette case with the name Dick and a spectacle case with the company name from Grahamstown in South Africa were found on the body. With the help of these clues it has been possible to identify the airman.

According to a letter sent to the (Swedish) Foreign Office and forwarded to us (the editor of Gotlands Allehanda) from his father, the name of the deceased was Richard Neville Todd-White. The family is living in Leytonstone England. The son had been in the RAF for eight years and also been on detachment to the South African Air Force for two years.

Through the Swedish Authorities the family received a translation of the articles in Gotlands Allehanda of the church service and burial with full military honours in Sproge church. The father expresses how grateful he is for all that was done for his deceased son.

The letter from the Press department of the (Swedish) Foreign Office runs as follows: “From the enclosed article in a Swedish newspaper we have found that it concerns my son Richard Todd-White. We have received from the Ministry a cigarette case and spectacle case marked Grahamstown, S.A., which led the Gotland authorities to assume he was a South-African airman. He served in the RAF approximately eight years and was on loan (sic) to the South African Air Force for two years during which time he was posted to Grahamstown for one year. (This last sentence has probably been badly

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translated to Swedish in the original text from English, but this is the gist of it.)

Would you be so kind and help us? My family wishes to convey our profound and deepest gratitude to the kind population of Gotland for the honour and the beautiful sympathy shown to our son's remains. I beg you to convey our gratitude to all that participated in this service. Words fail me in expressing how this kindness has alleviated the sorrow of the tragic death of our son.

Yours faithfully

Arthur I Todd-White"

(Gotlands Allehanda 3 March 1944)

(Certificate from the CWGC website. Check the name of his wife on this.)