

Wickstrom, Eric Torsten (B102804)



- Eric Torsten Wickstrom was born on 28 September 1921 in Hellgum, Sweden. He was 23 years old when he died of accidental injury on 31 December 1944 in the Netherlands.
- On 18 August 1941, he enlisted at the No. 2 District Depot in Sault Ste Marie. After basic training, he was sent to A-8 Canadian Armoured Corps Training Centre in Borden, Ontario, where he qualified as a driver. He was sent overseas in March 1942 and posted, on 21 May 1942, to the 7th Canadian Reconnaissance Regiment (17th Duke of York's Royal Canadian Hussars). He and his squadron were deployed to France on the 11 July 1944. On the 19 July he was wounded on his right forearm and evacuated to a hospital in England. On the 26 October 1944, he returned to the front lines to serve with the 7th Canadian Reconnaissance Regiment (17th Duke of York's Royal Canadian Hussars). He had no military experience prior to enlisting.
- He left school at the age of 16 after attending eight years of public school.
- Prior to enlisting, he was employed as a labourer for 3 months by Louis Aronson, a rock worker.
- According to his medical examination, he was 5 foot 6 inches tall and weighed 122 pounds. He had light brown hair and blue eyes. He was found fit for category A.
- Eric was the son of John (a mine worker) and Martha Wickstrom, who lived on R.R.2 in East Korah, Sault Ste. Marie, Ontario. They immigrate from Sweeden when Eric was eight years old. Eric had four siblings; Eva M. Swanson (24); Ruth E. Piner (20); Leonard (17); and Dorothy (13).
- Eric was a bachelor and had no children.
- His mother was the sole beneficiary of his will.
- His body is buried in the Groesbeek Canadian War Cemetery, Groesbeek, Netherlands (Ref II. B. 9.) (plot, row, grave)

Context

- After D-Day, the 7th Canadian Reconnaissance Regiment was deployed to France by squadron. Corporal Wickstrom arrived in France with his squadron in July 1944. In France, the Regiment took part in the battles of Caen, the River Laison and the Falaise Gap. It then pursued the retreating German Forces through France, eventually helping to encircle and obtain the surrender of the large fortified German garrisons along the English Channel. It then moved into Belgium and the Netherlands, where it participated in the battle of the Scheldt, and helped clear the enemy from the Breskens Pocket, the low-lying land south of the Scheldt Estuary. This operation was necessary to shorten the overextended supply lines from Normandy, and it gave the Allied Forces unrestricted access to the Port of Antwerp.

- After the Battle of the Scheldt, the advance of the Allied Forces stalled for the winter of 1944-45 notably while they redirected their supply lines through the Port of Antwerp and built up their supplies of ammunition, fuel, and other essential elements, in anticipation of a thrust into northern Germany. While this was going on, the River Waal in Central Netherlands became the frontline. Starting in October 1944, different British, Canadian, Belgian, and Dutch regiments rotated through a line of fortified outposts along the Allied side of the river. From 17 December 1944 to 3 February 1945, the 7th Canadian Reconnaissance Regiment occupied a line of fortified outposts along the Allied side of the river west of Nijmegen. On 30 December 1944, according to the war diary, the Regiment received information about what was happening across the river from each of its three squadrons. "A" Squadron, where Wickstrom was stationed that day, reported hearing machine-gun fire and passing motor freight. "B" Squadron reported seeing an adversary opening fire on an aircraft and "C" Squadron reported that all they could hear were trains and cars.
- However, on the morning of the next day, 31 December 1944, Corporal Wickstrom was travelling in a large truck with other soldiers to be witnesses at a military court martial in Nijmegen. Near Leeuwen, in the Netherlands, the truck driver swerved on icy roads to avoid striking two small children. The vehicle went out of control and overturned in a water-filled ditch. Only one soldier survived the accident; the others likely asphyxiated or drowned. A military board of inquiry ruled they were accidental deaths.
- The following statement was made by Lieutenant E.W. Smith, who was the sole survivor of the accident: "I was thrown into the back of the truck and found myself under water. I managed to get my head above the water and called to the other four. They all answered me. There was just room between the surface of the water and the floor of the truck to allow our heads above water. I was conscious and talking to all the others for some time. We tried to get out of the vehicle, but the doors were all jammed, and the armoured sides were resting on the bottom. The petrol was running out of the inverted tanks and falling on the water around us. The fumes were very strong. I then lost consciousness and regained in a house after being rescued. The others must have been overcome and slipped under water. My head was in one of the foot wells at the side of the vehicle and evidently I did not slip under."