



Tolstoi, Manitoba is the town where John was born on August 22, 1922.

*(Tolstoi was founded in the 1890s by Ukrainian immigrants and was one of the first Ukrainian settlements in Western Canada.)*

John's father, Peter, was born in Ukraine; John's mother, maiden name Olynyk, was Austrian by birth.

In the 1926 Prairie Census, the family name was still written as Syryda. John is listed as a 4-year-old, his sister Nettie as a 2-year-old.

According to information from 2001, from John's youngest brother, Nestor, there were four children. The third son must have been named William.

According to 1926 Census records, the family is Greek Catholic, the official language is English, but Ukrainian is also spoken well, as John indicates when he enlisted in the army. He also reports that he is Roman Catholic.

The family runs a small farm. John finished primary school and went to work in the mines.

John enlisted in the army on December 10, 1941.

His brother Nestor states in 2001 that, according to his mother, John would have been too young for the army.

But John was legally old enough to enlist at 19.

His medical report mentions few details:

brown hair and eyes, 1.75 m tall, slightly built, weighing just 65 kg.



Tolstoi School

John's first assignment was to the District Depot in Toronto. The year 1942 had hardly begun when John was transferred to the Infantry Training Centre at Camp Borden, Ontario.

John spent two months there, as on March 11, 1942, he was taken on strength by the Royal Canadian Engineers (RCE) training centre in Petawawa, Ontario.

In early April 1942, John was already assigned to the 8<sup>th</sup> Field Squadron of the RCE and transferred to Debert, Nova Scotia.

*To clarify:*

*By the 1940s, Debert, Nova Scotia, had become a major military center.*

*It was a training point for the Canadian Army. The facilities were adequate to accommodate a division-sized force. (approximately 15,000 troops)*

*It also served as an assembling point for troops departing for Europe.*

With his transfer to the United Kingdom looming, John received embarkation leave on May 18, 1942.

Information shared by John's brother Nestor in 2001 indicates that he spent this leave at home. Nestor calls it a "family reunion."

John departed for the United Kingdom on June 1, 1942. In UK, John started with seven days "Confined to Barracks" and 12 days' without pay.

The reason: he had extended his embarkation leave on his own initiative.

In September, he officially received four days' leave.

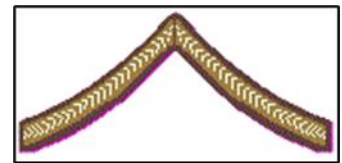
In October 1942, John was assigned to the Canadian Ordnance Reinforcement Unit for a week. This was an administrative unit responsible for all the equipment the troops needed. The reason was that he was receiving specific training.

John's file then underwent a few major time jumps. He received a week's leave in November 1942 and another week in February 1943.

His pay was increased to \$1.50 per day.

In early December 1943, John enrolled at the 26<sup>th</sup> Technical Training School (TTS). Upon his return, he was recorded having qualified as a "Shoe Repairer, Class C."

The timeline then jumps to June 15, 1944, when John is allowed to wear the Good Conduct Badge on his sleeve.



Then the reality of the battlefield starts for John on July 23, 1944, when he lands in Normandy, France.

Still assigned to the 8<sup>th</sup> Field Regiment RCE.

Clearing rubble near Caen, France, in early August; building bridges over the Somme River in early September 1944—John experiences it all.

While building bridges over the Leopold Canal in Belgium on October 13, 1944, he and seven others are wounded.

John suffers a gunshot wound to his left shoulder. He is admitted to No. 12 Canadian General Hospital in Bruges. He is discharged from the hospital on November 4, 1944.

He is again taken on strength by the 8<sup>th</sup> Field Squadron RCE.

The unit is then near Steenbergen, North Brabant in the Netherlands. In early December 1944, the entire Squadron was in the 's-Hertogenbosch region.

The relatively quiet winter months of 1944/1945, for the Engineers, were spent in the southern Netherlands, replenishing equipment and personnel, and testing new equipment.

According to a member of the Squadron in his private diary, Christmas dinner was served in a hall in Schijndel.

Afterward, a period of "rest" followed near Breda.

At the end of January 1945, the 8<sup>th</sup> Field Squadron was deployed in the capture of Kapelsche Veer.

The Rhineland Offensive, intended to push the enemy back beyond the Rhine, was launched on February 8, 1945, starting with Operation Veritable.

The 8<sup>th</sup> Field Squadron RCE also saw action. Kleve, Hochwald, and Sonsbeck are the locations noted in their reports.

In mid-March 1945, the 8<sup>th</sup> FS RCE was given a few weeks' rest and stationed near Tilburg (NL)

At the end of March 1945, the entire squadron moved back to the Kleve area in Germany.



Sappers of the Royal Canadian Engineers lay decking on the Blackfriars Bridge over the Rhine near Rees, Germany. March 30, 1945.  
© Library and Archives Canada

The plans were to build a bridge over the river Rhine at Emmerich. The preparatory work was disrupted by enemy fire.

To avoid wasting days, the Division, including the 8<sup>th</sup> Field Squadron, crossed the Rhine at Rees on April 1, 1945, using Blackfriar's Bridge.

After crossing the Rhine, the course of the Canadian advance was altered. On April 2, 1945, the unit crossed the German-Dutch border, their destination being the city of Ruurlo.

En route, their task and destination changed.

The new assignment: build a bridge over the Twente Canal south of Delden to enable the infantry to continue their advance on the north side of the canal.

They succeed, but the Squadron faces considerable challenges.

For example:

A bicycle lying on the side of the road turns out to be booby-trapped.



Delden, April 1945

*(A booby trap is an improvised weapon that, like a landmine, is concealed and activated by the victim.)*

How the explosive is triggered is unclear, but it is clear that seventeen Engineers are injured.

Two Engineers are also injured in a jeep accident near Delden, two have a motorcycle accident, and one man is trapped between two cars.

John Serada does not experience the bridge-laying and mine clearance operations up close. As a "shoe repairman," he is assigned to the Staff Company.

After the crossing near Delden, the squadron's advance continues, via Almelo (NL) and Meppen (Germany).

At approximately 6:00 p.m. on April 9, 1945, the Engineers arrived in Sögel, Germany.

The headquarters of the 8<sup>th</sup> Field Squadron, with its staff company and a signal unit, was established just north of Sögel at a cluster of buildings and a road intersection.

The following is a quote from an eyewitness account, a member of the 8<sup>th</sup> Field Squadron RCE.

*'On April 10, 1945, shortly after 8:00 a.m., gunfire rang out. Hindered by dense fog and accustomed to the sound of firearms, we failed to respond adequately. When we realized we were under attack, only about twenty men managed to quickly take cover and take up positions. Everyone, regardless of rank or position, who could handle a weapon sprang into action'.*

About 20 Germans and a few snipers attempted to neutralize the headquarters.

The Engineers managed to hold the enemy at bay until two tanks arrived to assist. Then the battle quickly ended.

The balance was drawn up. The commander was wounded; the Second in Command was killed. Three other Engineers were also mortally wounded.



Sherman tanks in Sögel. Original photo.  
Archive of the Municipality of Sögel.

Furthermore, three more men were wounded, including Sapper John Serada. John died of his wounds that same day.

John was given a temporary grave in Almelo; he likely arrived via the 6<sup>th</sup> Field Dressing Station in Meppen and was referred to the hospital in Almelo (NL). Unfortunately, nothing more could be done for him and April 10, 1945, officially became the day of his death.

He was later transferred to the CWGC Canadian War Cemetery in Holten. The grave designation is: Plot 3, Row C, Grave 16.

His headstone has an additional inscription:

Here lies the body of John  
May he rest in peace.  
Ever remembered  
by his loving family.

He was awarded:

*The 1939-1945 Star; the France-Germany Star; the Defence Medal; the 1939-1945 War Medal and the Canadian Volunteer Service Medal with Clasp.*

The sending of the medals got a follow-up. John's file contains a note dated November 5, 1949.

The medals could not be delivered, or they were rejected. In any case, they were returned and put back on stock again.

In 1995, a lake in Manitoba was named after him: Serada Lake.

*To clarify:*

*In 1945, the Geographical Names Board of Canada initiated a program to name previously unofficially named locations after victims from all three branches of the Canadian Armed Forces.*

*With approximately 100,000 lakes, most of them unnamed, Manitoba is an enthusiastic participant in the program. In 1995, the project was completed to commemorate the approximately 4,000 Manitoba victims of the Second World War by naming lakes, islands, and bays after them.*



Sources:

[www.cwgc.org](http://www.cwgc.org); [www.ancestry.com](http://www.ancestry.com); [www.canada.ca/library-archives](http://www.canada.ca/library-archives), [www.myheritage.nl](http://www.myheritage.nl)