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William Uggla — A Civil War Swede

Glen E. Brolander

One of the rewards of genealogical research is to learn more about a person than just the bare facts. Dates and places of birth, death, marriage, etc., serve only to identify a life. They do not tell what a person did with his or her life. This story deals with my efforts to learn more about the life of a distant relative, who came to America before the Civil War and who later became a victim of that war.

Conrad Vilhelm Mattias Uggla was born in the city of Karlstad (Värm.), Sweden on August 26, 1821, the son of Carl Vilhelm Uggla, a captain in the Värmland Field Rifles Regiment (*Fältjägareregemente*), and Sara Johanna Frykman. He entered the University of Uppsala in 1840 and seems shortly thereafter to have left for America, according to Elgenstierna.¹

Elgenstierna goes on to mention that in the United States Uggla served with the 159th North American Regiment, that he returned to Sweden, where he taught foreign languages in Stockholm in 1857 and that he subsequently returned to the U.S., where he enlisted in the Union forces in 1862 and later was killed in the Battle of Port Hudson May 27, 1863.

Armed with this information I thought that the primary move was to check the military records of the U.S. Army during the Civil War period. Upon investigation I found that it was possible to research military service records at the National Archives in Washington, DC and a request went off to the Archives, asking for a complete file on Conrad Vilhelm Mattias Uggla.²

The National Archives proved to be very cooperative and back came a file, which provided a great deal of fascinating information concerning Uggla, who upon enlisting in the U.S. Army had shortened his name to William Uggla. The first piece of information told that William Uggla, 38 years old, had on Sept. 16, 1862 married a Swedish lass from Halmstad, Sweden, named Anna Sophia Djurberg (Djurberg) at the City Hall in Brooklyn, NY. She was 26 years old at the time. On the same day William Uggla enrolled as an original member of Company H, 159th Regiment of New York Volunteers for military service in the War, for a term of three years or the duration of the war. The enrollment papers state that he was 5 feet, 7 inches tall, had light complexion, blue eyes, light hair and was by occupation a sailor. Company H was mustered into service on Nov. 1, 1862, at which time William Uggla was listed as a corporal.³

From these records we learn that Elgenstierna was in error when he states that Uggla joined the 159th Regiment in the 1840's, or on his first visit to the U.S. We can also only speculate as to William Uggla's return to America in 1862. Was

this due to his interest in joining the Civil War struggle, or his interest in marriage, or both of these motives?

The next item in the file is a letter dated June 21, 1863, written by Capt. W. O. Pettit of Company H, addressed to Mrs. Sophia Uggla. It reads as follows:

Dear Madam:

It becomes my very painful duty to inform you of the death of your beloved husband, Mr. William Uggla of Co. H, 159th Regt. N.Y.S.V. After having passed successfully and gallantly through the Battle of Irish Bend, we were ordered on the 27th Ult. to charge a rifle pit in possession of the enemy, and with four others of my company killed, he fell while pressing forward to the charge.

Receive, Dear Madam, my heartfelt sympathy, and also of the entire company.

Respectfully, your most obedient servant

W. O. Pettit, Captain³

In this battle in Louisiana, the Union forces pushed up the Mississippi River after capturing New Orleans, while other Union forces were pressing from the North. Following the capture of Vicksburg by Union units from the North and the capture of Port Hudson from the South, the Confederacy was cut into two parts and was doomed to defeat.

The next item in the file was correspondence from Anna Sophia Uggla, who after her husband's death, had returned to Stockholm. It is dated June 30, 1865 and is in the form of an application to the United States Government for a pension as being a widow of a soldier killed in battle. It was duly notarized and transmitted to the United States Consul in Stockholm.³

Following this is a letter from the Swedish Consul in New York to the Commissioner of Pensions in Washington, DC, endorsing the request.³ A later letter from the Swedish Consul on New York indicates that Mrs. Uggla was suffering great poverty.³

Finally on Jan. 19, 1866, almost three years after Uggla's death, the United States War Department approved a pension for Anna Sophia Uggla in the amount of \$8.00 per month, retroactive to May 27, 1863, the date of William Uggla's death.³

The next thing to do was to learn more about the early life of William Uggla, or Conrad Vilhelm Mattias Uggla, as he was known in Sweden. Here I found that the sources of the Swedish House of Nobles (*Riddarhuset*) came in good stead. This institution is the official depository for all the records dealing with the Swedish nobility. Its director and chief genealogist is Dr. Pontus Möller, who provided me with as much material as it was possible to gather.

Dr. Möller referred me to Elgenstierna, which contains biographical material concerning Uggla's father, Captain Carl Vilhelm Uggla, who had fought in Sweden's War with Russia 1808–1809.⁴ He also contacted the provincial archives in Göteborg (*Göteborgs landsarkiv*) as well as the Stockholm City Archives. The records of the parish church in Karlstad, young Uggla's birthplace, show that he had returned in 1857 to Karlstad from California and that he was

“not free to marry — abroad”.⁵ What this cryptic remark may mean is difficult to say. Was Ugglå married in California? Had he left his wife behind?

That he resided in California is proved by the entry in the U.S. Census for California of 1850, which shows that on Dec. 4 of that year a William Ugglå, 29 years old, a native of Sweden, by occupation a miner, was living on Dry Creek, Eldorado County together with another Swede named Charles Fleming.⁶ He was not married at this time, inasmuch as his wife would have been included in the census.

Though we have learned a great deal concerning Conrad Vilhelm Mattias Ugglå, we are still left with many unanswered questions. When did he first leave Sweden for California? Olsson’s two volume work on Swedish passenger arrivals in the U.S. 1820–1850 do not mention him.⁷ The passenger manifests for the city of San Francisco burned in a disastrous fire in the 1940’s and can give us no help.

Ugglå may have arrived in the U.S. as a sailor aboard a Swedish vessel or some other vessel, which may account for his not being listed on any passenger manifest. This theory is also strengthened by the fact that he was listed as a sailor at the time of his enlistment.

The thousands of crew lists on deposit in the National Archives in Washington may yield the information, but since these lists have not been indexed, it would be a herculean task to sift through this enormous collection.

Other questions remain. Who was the girl he seems to have married in California? What happened to her? As is true with most genealogical research, new information yields new problems. Perhaps some day we shall find the answers. In the meantime, we are beginning to get a clearer picture of Conrad Vilhelm Mattias Ugglå, alias William Ugglå, a university-trained son of a Swedish army officer, who on two occasions answered the call of adventure from the New World and who finally gave his life for a cause to which he had been attracted. It is discoveries such as these which make genealogical research so rewarding.

¹ Elgenstierna, Gustaf, *Den introducerade svenska adelns ättartavlor*, I–IX (Stockholm, 1925–1936), VIII, pps. 437–438. This excellent reference work contains biographical material on the entire Swedish nobility, entered in the Swedish House of Nobles, as far back as there are records. Information is presented by means of tables and it is often quite easy to trace a line back 400 to 500 years. This very useful biographical tool is available in the United States in a few libraries, such as the Library of Congress, The New York Public Library, Yale University Library and the Library of the University of Minnesota.

² As a guide to research students, I might mention that the easiest way to procure information concerning military records in the National Archives is to request GSA Form 6751 and forward it to Military Service Records (NNCC), National Archives and Records Service (GSA), Washington, DC 20408.

³ Military Service Records from the National Archives and Records Service.

⁴ Elgenstierna, VIII, p. 437.

⁵ *Karlstads stadsförsamlings husförhörslängd*, AI:23, fol. 47 and 116, Göteborgs landsarkiv.

⁶ *U.S. Census*, California, I, p. 850.

⁷ Olsson, Nils William, *Swedish Passenger Arrivals in New York 1820–1850* (Stockholm and Chicago, 1967) and Olsson, Nils William, *Swedish Passenger Arrivals in U.S. Ports 1820–1850 (except New York)* (Stockholm and St. Paul, MN, 1979).