

P/O Joseph Simon Sleigher J/86376, Royal Canadian Air Force.



Simon (no one called him Joseph) Sleigher was born on 12 June 1922 in Drapeau, Quebec Province in Canada, the eldest son of Joseph and Marie Sleigher. Within this large family he had five sisters and six brothers. After leaving school in 1937, he gained a commercial diploma out of Dalhousie College on the northern border of New Brunswick. From 1939 to 1942 he worked as a clerk for several companies including the large International Paper Company in Dalhousie.

He enlisted for RCAF service on 12 October 1942 in Montreal and after initial training was awarded his Air Gunner's badge on 25 June 1943. Arriving in England at the end of July 1943 he was posted to 23 OTU at Pershore on 3 August 1944, where he crewed up with much of what became the "Evans" crew. They were then posted to Dalton on 15 September to attend the Battle School and thence to 1659 HCU at Topcliffe until 26 October when he alongside his crew, was posted to 434 Squadron and worked up to becoming an operational crew. 434 (Bluenose) Squadron was at the time equipped with the Handley Page Halifax V bomber, and operated out of RAF Croft, in Yorkshire.

On 18 March 1944 Simon Sleigher was one of the air gunners and part of the crew of eight, which took off at 1834 hours from RAF Croft, Yorkshire, in Halifax LL178, Code WL-R, (which bore the name "The old straw Hat"), to undertake a mine laying operation in the Heligoland area. This operation was a diversionary raid whilst Frankfurt was being bombed by 846 other aircraft. This aircraft was one of 98 which had taken off for this diversion.

All went well on the outward trip, with the mines being successfully dropped. Returning home the crew were advised that bad weather had developed over Croft. For reasons unknown, LL178 descended through cloud over the North Yorkshire Moors, something they and all crews were briefed not to do. The crew may have thought that they were over the last hill and in poor visibility began their descent to land. The aircraft struck the ground and crashed near Kepwick Bank Top, 7 miles ESE of Northallerton, at 2300 hours killing all on board. The crash report stated that the aircraft crashed whilst flying at a steep angle.

Simon Sleigher was 21 years old.

He is buried in the Harrogate (Stonefall) Cemetery, Yorkshire.

He is commemorated on IBCC Panel 242.

Photo source: www.veterans.gc.ca.