

Keller, Ross Whaley
Flying Officer
Royal Canadian Air Force
438 Squadron
J/37649



'Going down'



Ross Whaley Keller was born in Durham, Grey County, Ontario, Canada on Sunday February 18, 1923. He was the son of George Albert Keller and Rebecca May Jane Patterson. They got married on Wednesday February 25, 1920 in Durham. Ross Whaley had two brothers, Bruce and Royden. He also had one sister, Edith Keller. They were religious and belonged to the Foursquare Church. The Keller family owned a farmhouse and lived in Durham.

He attended primary school at Varney Public School from 1925 until 1935, followed by Durham High School from 1935 until 1940.

His best marks were in geometry and trigonometry. In 1940 Ross Whaley started working as a bank employee at the Canadian Bank of Commerce in Durham, Ontario.

Ross had brown hair and brown eyes, weighed 159 pounds and was 5 ft 10 inches tall. He was a perfectly healthy young man, who neither smoked nor drank alcohol. He played rugby and baseball; these were his only hobbies. On July 20, 1942 Ross signed up in Hamilton, Ontario, with the Royal Canadian Air Force.

Signature of Recruit

On August 10, 1942 he was assigned to No 5 Manning Depot in Lachine, a

municipality in the city of Montreal, on the island of Montreal, in the south-west of Quebec, Canada.

No 5 Manning Depot was opened on June 20, 1942 and was one of the five crew depots of the British Commonwealth Air Training Plan (BCATP). This is where his military career started, where he learned how to bathe, shave, polish his boots, brush his buttons, maintain his uniform and otherwise behave in the required manner. Every day they had physical education for two hours as well as instruction on marching, how to use a rifle, saluting and other routines. He was given the rank of Aircraftsman 2nd Class. Ross Whaley was admitted to hospital for four days on September 1. On October 24 Ross Whaley went for a training to No 9 Bomber and Gunnery School in Mont-Joli, Quebec. Here they trained in AVRO Anson, Fairey Battle bombers, Bristol Bolingbroke and Westland Lysander planes.



Source : <https://bcatp.wordpress.com/>

For additional training he went to No 3 Initial Training School in Sacred Heart College, Victoriaville, Quebec on February 20, 1943, and took part in the British Commonwealth Air Training Plan.

Candidates for becoming pilots and air observers started their twenty-six or twenty-eight week training programme off with four weeks at an Initial Training School (ITS). They studied theoretical subjects and were subjected to various tests. Theoretical studies comprised navigation, flight theory, meteorology, officer's tasks, air force administration, algebra and trigonometry.

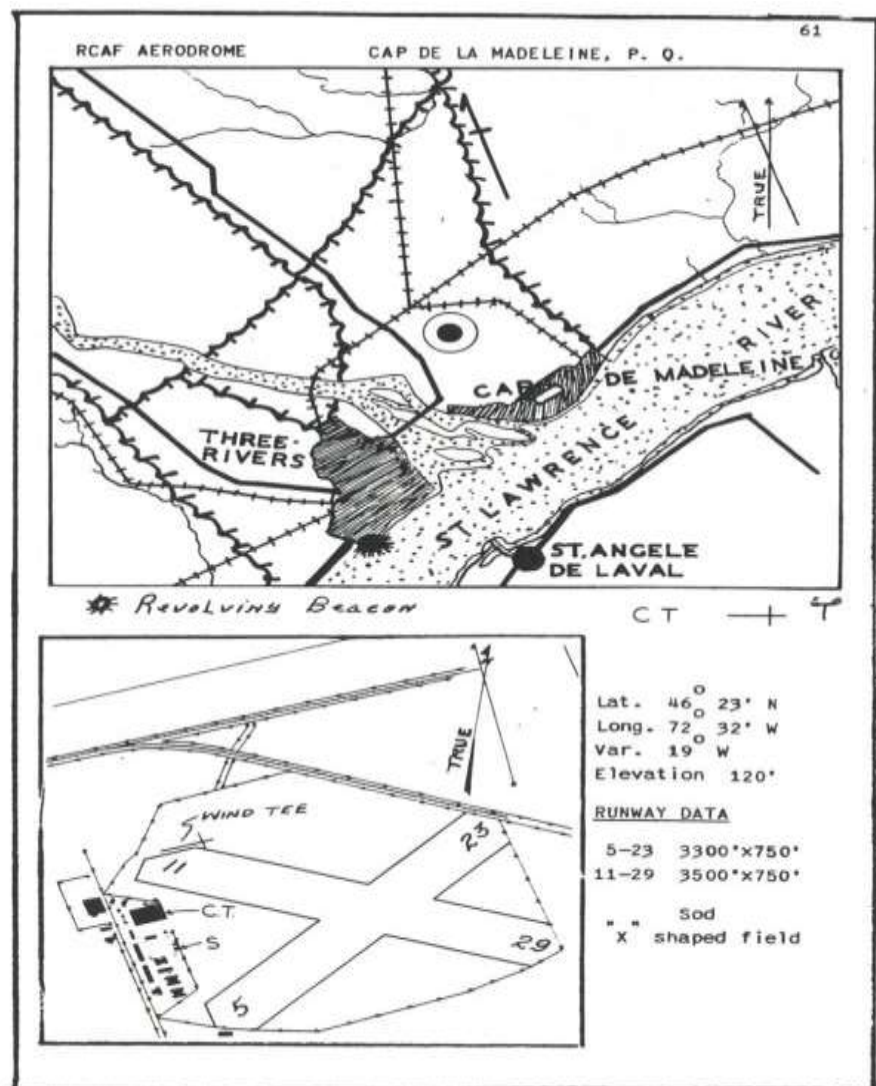
They also had an interview with a psychiatrist, underwent the four-hour M2 physical examination, had a session in a decompression chamber and a 'test flight' in a Link Trainer (flight simulation). At the end of the course the placements were made known. On April 30 he was given the rank of L.A.C. -Leading Aircraftsman. Ross Whaley was assigned to No 11 Elementary Flying Training School (EFTS) in Cap-de-la-Madeleine, Quebec on May 15, 1943, in order to continue his training as a pilot.

The aircraft that were used for training were the Fleet Finch and later the Fleet Cornell. He took fifty hours of basic flight

instruction for a period of eight weeks there. He continued his training on July 10, 1943 at No 13 Service Flying Training School (SFTS) in Saint Hubert, Quebec. On October 29, 1943 Ross Whaley Keller received his 'Wings'.

After graduating, the new pilots were given various tasks, possibly abroad with the Royal Air Force or a Royal Canadian Air Force squadron, or in Canada as an instructor or staff pilot with the British Commonwealth Air Training Plan, or serving in squadrons of the Royal Canadian Air Force Home Defence.

On November 20 he was assigned to No 1 Operational Training Unit in Saguenay, Quebec, which was part of the Home War Establishment of the Royal Canadian Air Force responsible for flight operations on Canada's Atlantic coast during the Second World War.



On April 23, 1944 Ross Whaley Keller was assigned to No 1 Embarkation Depot of 'Y' Depot, in order to prepare to go overseas to England, where he set foot ashore on May 3, 1944. He was assigned to No 3 Personnel Reception Centre, in Bournemouth, Hampshire, waiting to be deployed to other units. Ross Whaley was ultimately stationed with 438 Squadron, Royal Canadian Air force, and went to the Netherlands on October 26, 1944.



The squadron was stationed at B.78 airbase in Eindhoven after it had followed the Allied advance from France and Belgium. The squadron carried out support missions, whereby it attacked German positions on the frontline. A letter dated November 4, 1944, written by Squadron/Leader Robert Reid: *'This pilot has only recently joined our squadron, yet he has proved to be a stable and capable pilot during the short period that he has been with us.'* On December 7 he was awarded the Maple Leaf emblem.



Early in the morning of January 1, 1945 the Luftwaffe carried out a big attack during Operation Bodenplatte. This attack took place on airfields of the Allied Forces in the Netherlands, Belgium, Luxemburg and Northern

France. The Luftwaffe's aim was to take out as many enemy airfields, hangars and planes near the front of the Ardennes offensive as possible.

438 and 439 Squadrons of the Royal Canadian Air Force were about to take off from Eindhoven airfield when the attack started, so many of their planes were sitting unprotected on the runway. As the Leader Lieutenant Peter Wilson was the first to try and take off, followed by second man Flying Officer Ross Whaley Keller and six other Typhoons when the Luftwaffe started attacking. Hardly had they taken off from the runway when Flying Officer Ross Whaley Keller was hit and attempted to carry out an emergency landing outside the field, which failed. His plane caught fire and he died at the age of 23.

During the attack, sixty of the one hundred and twenty-five Typhoons on the basis were damaged. Although twenty-four planes could be repaired on the spot, seventeen were destroyed and nine were so badly damaged that they were beyond repair.

Ross Whaley Keller was buried at the General Cemetery in Woensel on January 3, grave SS.5, next to Flight Lieutenant Peter Wilson.



On November 12, 1945 he was reburied at the Canadian War Cemetery in Groesbeek, grave reference **XV. D. 5.**

The grave in those first days, in 1954 the crosses were replaced by tombstones. The family could enter a text.

On his headstone the following words are inscribed:

REMEMBER THY CREATOR IN THE
DAYS OF THY YOUTH

SAFE IN THE ARMS OF JESUS



Awards Ross Whaley Keller:

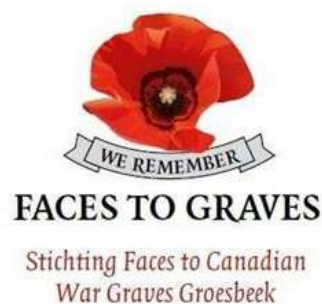
- 1939-1945 Star
- Service Medal
- Canadian Volunteer service Medal with Clasp
- France and Germany Star

Photo: <http://lestweforget1945.org/>

In a letter dated January 8, 1945, written by Squadron/Leader Robert Reid to Mr Keller it said: *'Early in the morning of January 1, 1945 your son*

left on an armed reconnaissance flight to enemy territory in Typhoon 1B PD503 and flew as 'no. 2' after the leader of the mission, one of my Flight Commanders, when the airfield was attacked by enemy planes. What happened next is not generally known due to the confusion that was caused by the continuous attack, but because Ross was just taking off when the attack took place, he was in no position to fight and the plane was shot down. We are sure that he died instantly... Your son's funeral took place in Eindhoven, the Netherlands, at 10.30 hours on January 3. The service was led by our Protestant chaplain, S/L Perkins. His body was laid to rest in Eindhoven next to his co-pilot's, the Flight Leader who died during the same enemy attack. Due to war operations it was not possible to grant him full service honour, but his funeral was attended by his co-pilots and the Last Post was sounded. Shortly I hope to send you photographs of this funeral. Although Ross had only been with the Squadron for a short time, he was very popular among everyone and was well on his way to becoming a top pilot. Ross was on his 14th operational mission when this unfortunate attack took place. He had flown operationally across enemy territory for 15 hours and 50 minutes.'

During his time as a pilot Flying Officer Ross Whaley Keller kept a diary.



Life story: Gijs Krist - Research Team Faces To Graves

Sources:

Commonwealth War Graves

Library and Archives Canada

www. Aircrewremembered.com

With courtesy of Anne Gafiuk/ Typhoon Project

* Do you have a photo of this soldier or additional information please contact info@facestograves.nl