Billy Bishop Museum's 2026 Honouring Our Local Veterans

Pilot Officer Edward Clayton Howey
No. 431 Squadron RCAF

Family Life

Edward Clayton Howey was born on August 15, 1917, in Indian Head, Saskatchewan, to Minnie L. (née Connell) and James Howey. At the age of three, the family moved to Chatsworth, Ontario. He had four sisters: Marjorie McCauley Howey, Rosemary Adelle McKessock, Jean Melissa Kirk, and June Daen Kirk. His father was the Deputy-Reeve of Chatsworth for a number of years in the 1940s.

Clayton attended four years of high school at the Chatsworth Continuation School, where he played soccer and hockey. His medical records indicate that he had been knocked unconscious while boxing as a teenager, suffered jaundice at age 14, and had measles and chicken pox as a child.

Before enlisting, Clayton had worked as a farm hand on two local farms and was a constable for the Town of Chatsworth from May to September 1937. He was working as a milk salesman for Northland Productions Dairy in Timmins when he left for initial military training. His final position before enlisting was with Goodyear Tire Company in New Toronto.

Clayton married Jean McKessock, in January 1943. The wedding took place in Windsor, Ontario, as Jean was completing post-graduate work at the Detroit Women's Hospital. Following Clayton's transfer overseas, Jean took a position as supervisor of the nursery at the General and Marine Hospital, Owen Sound. Following Clayton's death, Jean remarried Albert Carnelly Brook of Boissevain, Manitoba, in October 1946.

Decorations

- 1939-1945 Star
- Air Crew Europe Star
- Defence Medal
- Canadian Volunteer Service Medal
- War Medal 1939-1945

Military Service

Prior to enlisting with the Royal Canadian Air Force, Clayton had completed training with the Algonquin Regiment in North Bay, Ontario, in 1941. He enlisted with the RCAF on December 17, 1941 in Toronto. An RCAF recruiting officer noted he was "extremely, highly motivated for P. (pilot)." After his initial training, Clayton was then posted to an Elementary Flying School in Oshawa and No. 16 Service Flying Training School at Hagersville, Ontario. He received his pilot's wings on December 29, 1942.

Clayton embarked to England from Halifax on January 26 and arrived in Liverpool on February 4, 1943. Upon arrival in England, Clayton was taken into the RAF Trainee Pool. He was stationed in Bournemouth with No. 3 Personnel Reception Unit before transferring to No. 20 Pilot Advance Flying Unit in Oxfordshire. His training continued at No. 24 Operational Unit RAF Honeybourne. His last posting was at No. 1664 Conversion Unit, where he learned to fly the heavy four engine Halifax bomber. On December 6, 1943, he joined No. 431 Squadron to began active operations over mainland Europe.

On the evening of February 25, 1944, Flight Sergeant Howey and the crew of Halifax LK.705 took part in a mining operation over the Baltic Sea. Failing to return, the crew was listed as "missing in action," with notice being sent to Howey's parents and wife on February 28, 1944.

According to a letter written to Jean Howey dated May 21, 1946, from the RCAF Casualty Officer for the Chief of Air Staff, Howey's Halifax was attacked by two German night fighters at approximately 11:45 PM. During the fight, the Halifax was hit. Two explosions took place before the aircraft hit the ground. One of the German planes was also hit and the pilot bailed out. He went to see the wreckage the next day and viewed the remains. Reports from captured German documents noted that due to the nature of the crash, only the remains of Sgt. A.D. Macgillivray were able to be identified, while four "unknowns" were buried in Gravelund Cemetery near the crash site. It would take another two months before confirmation was sent to James Howey confirming the burial of his son. A Danish citizen confirmed that Section A, Row 8, graves 24 and 25 held the remains of six of the aircrew, with MacGillivray buried in grave 23. In total four Canadians, Pilot Officer Clayton Howey, Navigator Flight Sergeant George E. Stevenson, Air Gunner Sergeant Alexander M. Munro and Rear Gunner Sgt. Leo T. Wardell and three British airmen were killed in the crash and interred at Esbjerg Fovrfelt Cemetery.

Shortly after the crash, a cross was erected on the crash site and in the summer of 1946, a large memorial stone with the names of the deceased aircrew was placed.