

Benjamin (Ben) Sigler was the youngest of the four sons of (Bernard) Leon and Claire nee Cohnen born on 07 June 1922 in Chemnitz, Germany.

Leon Sigler was one of the six children born to Jakob Mendel Sigler (23.02.1854 – 15.10.1925) and Serline Horn (24.01.1853). He also had three half-brothers from Jakob's second marriage to Rachel Schoenfeld, Serline having died 30 July 1905 when Leon was 24 years old. Jakob was a merchant who was born in the Moldavian province of Romania and who fled to Germany in about 1890 following the rise of anti-Semitism.

Leon, who was born in the small town of Buhusi in Moldavia, came to England at the end of 1933, shortly after the Nazis came to power. He moved to Southgate in North London with his wife and two youngest sons – the two eldest following later and shortly after Kristalnacht in 1938. Leon was essentially a salesman who in his early twenties went to the USA 'to seek his fortune' but returned to Chemnitz when his mother died. Although he had made considerable money in the past, when he arrived in England, he had to start afresh, with a loan of £500 and a series of contacts and agencies. Over time he built a business manufacturing and selling men's shirts and led a relatively prosperous life.

Of Leon's brothers, Arthur was murdered in Auschwitz, Max, Karl and Sally (Solomon) fled to Greece. Sally was betrayed to the Gestapo and murdered, Max disappeared and was presumed murdered, while Karl joined the communist partisans and was presumed to have died in action. Hermann emigrated to Canada, Willy emigrated to England, while Ewald died at birth and Emil committed suicide in 1923.

Ben's mother, Claire, was born in Neuss, near Dusseldorf in Germany and apparently met Leon on a train while commuting to work. They married in 1914 in London – where her father was living at the time. She was the daughter of David Cohnen and Sarah Winter. One of Claire's sisters, Helene, moved to Chemnitz and, eventually married Max, one of Leon's brothers. She also escaped to Greece (many of the Sigler family had Greek passports having acquired them from the local friendly Greek Consul when living in Romania) and was hidden by a Greek colonel for part of the war.

Ben started his schooling at a Latin-based grammar school in Chemnitz but left before finishing his schooling there. When he arrived in London, he went to Enfield Grammar School and then on to a technical college from which he volunteered for the Royal Air Force. He joined up in 1940 and after a year he had finished his training and had become a Pilot Sergeant. In November 1941, while on leave, he wrote to his cousin that 'the training had been a great physical and mental strain and that he now had to build up his reserves for the future'. He also wrote that he had been recommended for heavy bombers and that his pilot's assessment had been 'above average'. In a further letter, written in January 1941 from RAF Lichfield he talked about being on duty seven days a week and the difficulties of getting to meet his cousin who was working around nearby Birmingham.

Ben took part, as a co-pilot of a Wellington bomber of RAF 12 Squadron, in the 1000 bomber raid on Cologne and was shot down over Amsterdam on 31 May 1942 while returning to base. He is buried in the New Eastern Cemetery in Amsterdam. Many years later, part of the wreckage of his plane was found on a building site in Badhoevedorp near Schiphol airport, Amsterdam, and the local people erected a monument to the memory of Ben and his fellow crew members

Courtesy of Nick Sigler