Leonard Gerrard SELLARS (1911 – 1943)



Pilot Officer

L.G.SELLARS

Royal Australian Air Force

Attached to RAF

1657 Conversion Unit

22nd July 1943 Age 31

WHO LOST HIS LIFE THROUGH HIS UNSHAKEN FIDELITY TO DUTY

(No photograph available)

Leonard Gerrard Sellars was born in Brisbane, Queensland on 12 September 1911 the eldest child of Harry Roy Gerrard Sellars and his wife Violet Gwendoline nee Pott. Len as he was known had a brother Harry Frederick Gerrard who was born in 1914 and a sister Jessie Elizabeth Falconer born in 1916.

The family moved to the state of Victoria, settling in Brighton, East Melbourne. Sadly, his brother Harry was to die in 1931, aged just 17 years.

In 1934 Len was living with his parents at 108 George Street and was employed as a warehouseman.

3422 Seeley, Doris Russell, 180 Clarendon st., nurse, F
3423 Sellars, Harry Roy Gerrard, 108 George st., manager, M
3424 Sellars, Leonard Gerrard, 108 George st., warehouseman, M
3425 Sellars, Violet Gwendoline, 108 George st., home duties, F
3426 Sellick, Thomas Ernest Arthur, 54 Albert st., labourer, M

By 1939 they had moved to 5 Robe Street in nearby St Kilda West, Melbourne and Len was working in sales.

SOLACE after many recent "also-rans," despite great scores, came to Len Sellars, Riversdale 3-marker on Saturday. In company with H. A. Mullett, State Director of Agriculture, he won the four-ball aggregate stableford with a total of 81 points. For six grand consecutive rounds glance at these by Sellars, who is a senior pennant player—71, 72, 73, 70, 72, 72. Surely he must achieve a scratch rating this season!

It would seem that Len was a keen golfer for in 1940 the Sporting Globe ran an article about him at the Riversdale 3-Marker.

On 27 February 1941, Len married Mollie Victoria Sayce (photo right) at the Irving memorial Presbyterian Church, East Malvern. Len's best man was his brother in law Albert (known as Bas) Carlyle. Their reception was held at the Oriental Hotel, one of Melbourne's finest dining and accommodation venues.

East Malvern Wedding

The Irving Memorial Presbyterian Church, East Malvern, was chosen for the wedding of Mollie Victoria, youngest daughter of Mr. and Mrs. A. M. Sayce, Campbell-street, Brighton, to Leonard Gerrard, son of Mr. and Mrs. H. R. G. Sellars, Hotel Australia, Melbourne. Rev. W. Johnston officiated.

White crepe fashioned the bride's gown, which was made on classical lines with a beaded bodice and short sleeves, and frangipani held her short tulle veil in place. Miss Gwen Sayce, the bridesmaid, wore a white marquisette frock, and Anne Carlyle, the flower girl, wore a long net frock. Mr. A. E. Carlyle was best man. A reception at the Oriental followed the ceremony.

The event was mentioned in several newspapers.

The Age (Melbourne, Vic.) Mon 3 Mar 1941 ran this report which indicates that Len was living at the Hotel Australia, Melbourne.

After their marriage they settled at 19 Dudley Street, Brighton, Melbourne.



Prior to enlisting in the RAAF in April 1941, Len had served 204 days in the 5th Division Victorian Scottish Regiment. Trained as a Pilot Officer he was attached to the RAF in England.

In July 1943 Len was at RAF Stradishall, Suffolk with No.1657 Heavy Conversion Unit. This Heavy Conversion Unit provided a 3-4 week long course for the purpose of training men to become proficient heavy-bomber crew members. They were flying Short Stirling aircraft.



Short Stirling code XT-M of No. 1657 Heavy Conversion Unit at RAF Stradishall

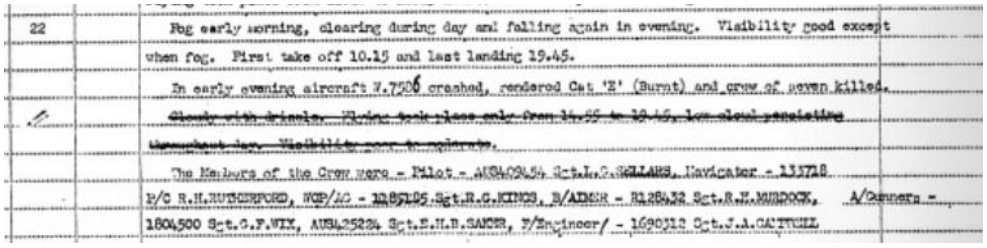
Len was a member of a seven man crew comprising of 2 Australians, 1 Canadian and 4 British airmen:

P/O (Pilot) Leonard Gerrard Sellars (Australian)
Sgt (Flt. Eng.) John Archibald Campbell
F/O (Nav.) Robert Henry Rutherford
F/S (Bomb Aimer) Raymond Henry Murdock (Canadian)

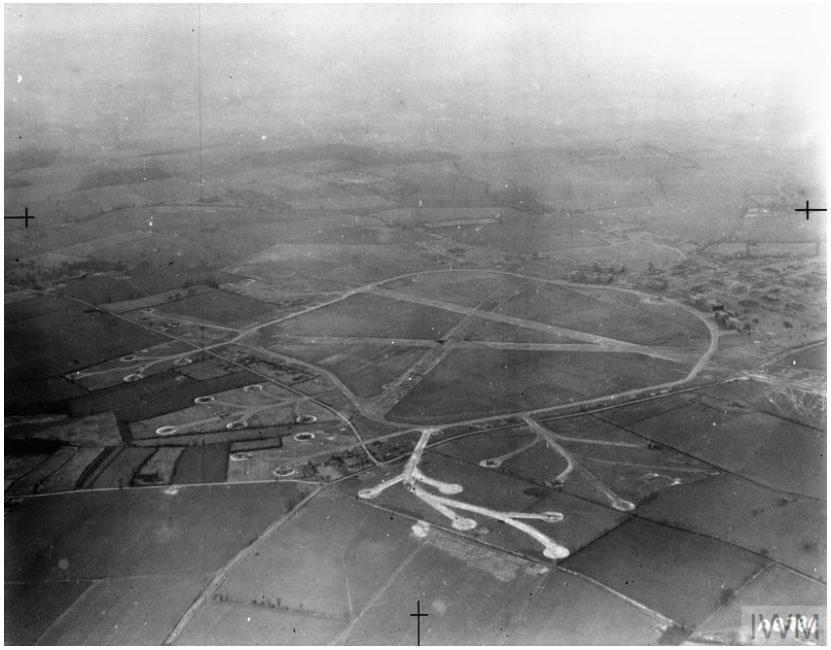
Sgt (W.Op./Air Gnr.) Richard George Kings
1804500 Sgt (Air Gnr.[MUG]) George Frank Albert Wix
AUS425224 F/S (Air Gnr.[Rear]) Ernest Henry Benjamin Saker (Australian)

On 22 July 1943, Stirling I W7586 of No.1657 Heavy Conversion Unit, with Len's crew onboard, took off from RAF Stradishall detailed to carry out three engine flying practice circuit and landings.

Len was undertaking his second solo flight without an instructor. An entry from the log for the day records that there was fog early morning which cleared during the day, falling again in the evening. The first take off was at 1015 hrs and the last landing was at 195 hrs. In the early evening his aircraft crashed with the loss of all crew members.



22		Fog early morning, clearing during day and falling again in evening. Visibility good except when fog. First take off 10.15 and last landing 19.45.
		In early evening aircraft W.7586 crashed, rendered Cat 'E' (Burnt) and crew of seven killed.
		~~Cloudy with drizzle. Flying took place only from 14.05 to 19.45. Low cloud persisting throughout day. Visibility poor to moderate.~~
		The Members of the Crew were - Pilot - AUS409454 Sgt.L.G.SELLARS, Navigator - 131718
		P/O R.H.RUTHERFORD, WOP/AG - 1385195.Sgt.R.G.KINGS, B/AIMSR - 812832 Sgt.R.F.MURDOCK, A/Gunners -
		1804500 Sgt.G.F.WIX, AUS425224 Sgt.E.H.B.SAKER, F/Engineer/ - 1690312 Sgt.J.A.CATTELL



An enquiry into the crash concluded that during the course of the flight, engine trouble made it necessary for the pilot to feather the starboard outer engine and make a normal three-engined approach.

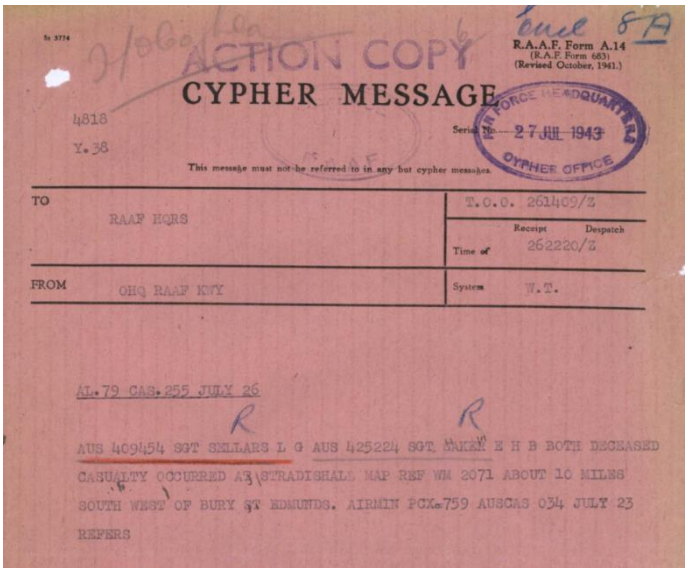
As the approach was made to the leaward side of the runway at 100 feet above the ground, the pilot realised that it would be necessary to go round again.

Control of the aircraft was lost and after a stall turn to starboard it crashed into the ground at 1746 hrs causing what must have been instant death to all crew members.

No reason could be given for the engine trouble as the aircraft was completely burnt out.

P/O Leonard Gerrard Sellars was buried at Haverhill cemetery, Suffolk, England, grave 251, section U. Next to him lies Ernest Henry Benjamin Saker the other Australian member of the crew.

This cypher message was sent to RAAF headquarters informing them of the deaths of Leonard G Sellars and Ernest HB Saker.



R.A.A.F. Form A.14
(R.A.F. Form 6831)
(Revised October, 1941.)

ACTION COPY

CYPHER MESSAGE

4818
Y.38

Serial No. 27 JUL 1943

AIR FORCE HEADQUARTERS CYPHER OFFICE

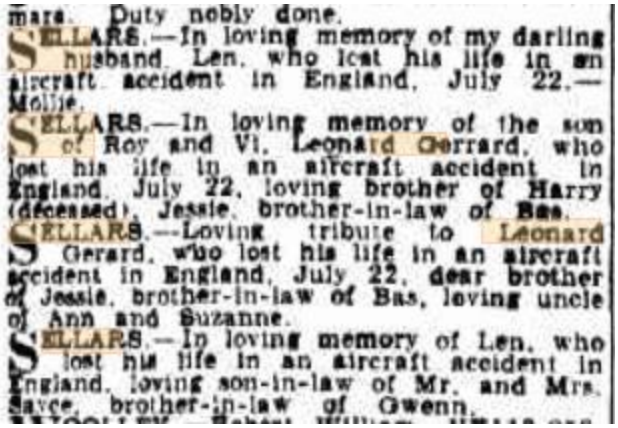
This message must not be referred to in any but cypher messages.

TO RAAF HQRS	T.O.O. 261409/Z	
	Receipt	Despatch
	Time of 262220/Z	
FROM OHQ RAAF KNY	System W.T.	

AL.79 CAS.255 JULY 26

R R

AUS 409454 SGT SELLARS L G AUS 425224 SGT SAKER E H B BOTH DECEASED CASUALTY OCCURRED AT STRADISHALL MAP REF WM 2071 ABOUT 10 MILES SOUTH WEST OF BURY ST EDMUNDS. AIRMIN PCK.759 AUSCAS 034 JULY 23 REFERS



mara. Duty nobly done.
SELLARS.—In loving memory of my darling husband, Len, who lost his life in an aircraft accident in England, July 22.—Mollie.
SELLARS.—In loving memory of the son of Roy and Vi, Leonard Gerrard, who lost his life in an aircraft accident in England, July 22, loving brother of Harry (deceased), Jessie, brother-in-law of Bas.
SELLARS.—Loving tribute to Leonard Gerard, who lost his life in an aircraft accident in England, July 22, dear brother of Jessie, brother-in-law of Bas, loving uncle of Ann and Suzanne.
SELLARS.—In loving memory of Len, who lost his life in an aircraft accident in England, loving son-in-law of Mr. and Mrs. Sayce, brother-in-law of Gwenn.

Back home in Melbourne news of Len's death was reported in The Argus (Melbourne).

All Australian casualty names are projected onto the exterior of the Hall of Memory. Leonard Gerrard Sellars's name will be projected on: Wed 24 February 2021 at 2:53am and Wed 05 May 2021 at 11:52pm.

His name is also on panel 130 in the Commemorative Area at the Australian War Memorial (as indicated by the poppy on the plan).

