Ernest Henry Benjamin SAKER (1923 – 1943)



425224 Flight Sergeant

E.H.B.SAKER

Royal Australian Air Force

Attached to RAF

1657 Conversion Unit

22nd July 1943 Age 20

HE DID HIS DUTY

(No photograph available)

Ernest Henry Benjamin Saker was born in Bowen, Queensland on 22 July 1923 the son of Ernest William Barton and Mary Catherine Saker (nee O'Reilly). His father had fought with the 1st AIF during the First World War. Ernest had a younger brother, Kevin Frederick who was born in 1926. Bowen is in the Whitsunday region of North Queensland.

On the outskirts of Bowen is the small town of Merinda where the family lived and where Ernest attended school.

After leaving school, Ernest found employment as a clerk but with the outbreak of war he enlisted and it was as a Flight Sergeant serving with the RAAF that he was attached to the RAF in England.

In July 1943 Ernest 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.



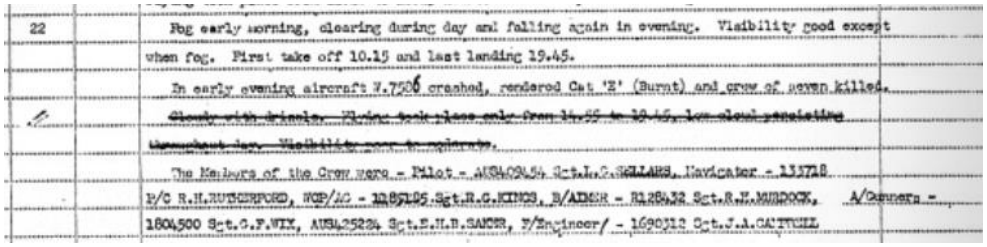
Short Stirling code XT-M of No. 1657 Heavy Conversion Unit at RAF Stradishall

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

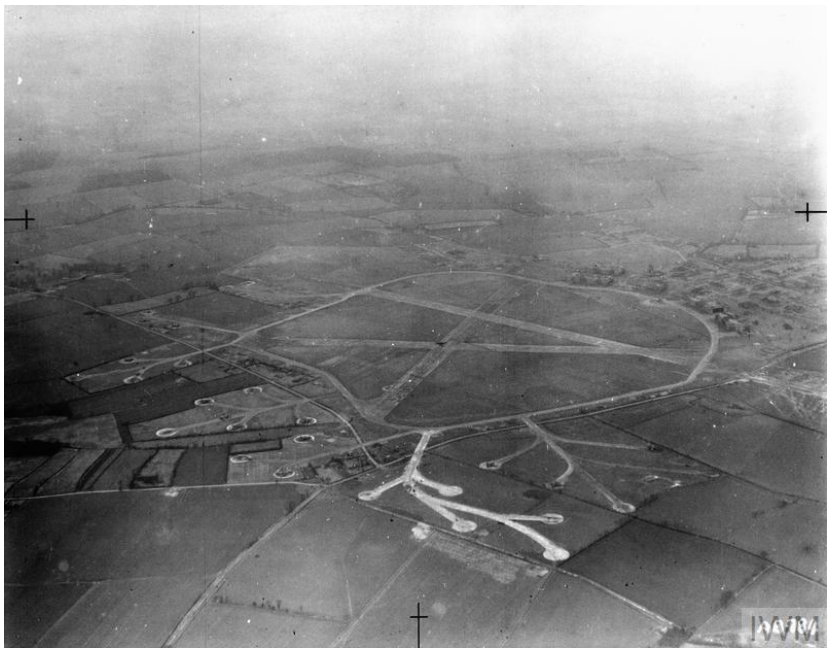
P/O (Pilot) Leonard Gerrard Sellars (Australian)
Sgt (Flt. Eng.) John Archibald Campbell
F/O (Nav.) Robert Henry Rutherford
F/S (Bomb Aimer) Raymond Henry Murdock (Canadian)
Sgt (W.Op./Air Gnr.) Richard George Kings
1804500 Sgt (Air Gnr.[MUG]) George Frank Albert Wix
AUS425224 F/S (Air Gnr.[Rear]) Ernest Henry Benjamin Saker (Australian)

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

The pilot, Sgt Sellars, 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 Ernest's aircraft crashed with the loss of all crewmembers.



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 14.55 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 - 1387195 Sgt.R.G.KINGS, B/ADSR - R126432 Sgt.R.W.MURDOCK, A/Gunners - 1804500 Sgt.G.F.WIX, AUS425224 Sgt.E.H.B.SAKER, F/Engineer/ - 1590312 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.

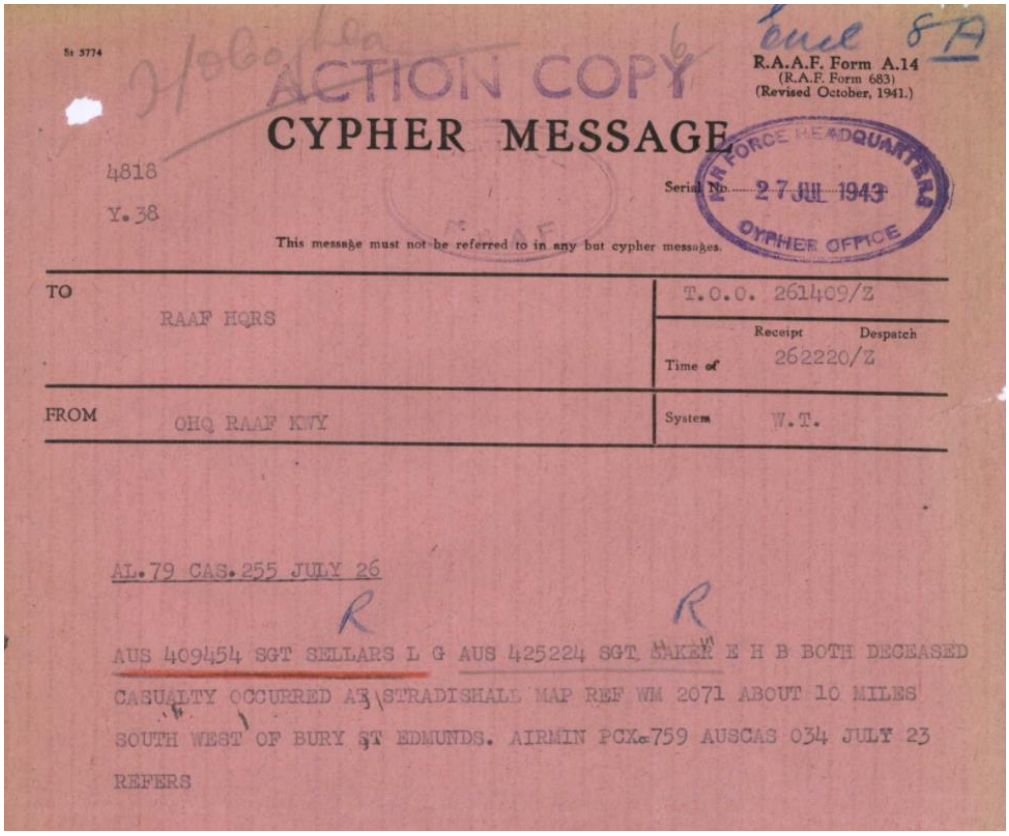
As the approach was made to the leeward side of the runway at 100 feet above the ground, the pilot realised that it would be necessary to go round again.

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 crewmembers.

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

Ernest Henry Benjamin Saker was buried at Haverhill cemetery, Suffolk, England, grave 250, section U. Next to him lies P/O Leonard Gerrard Sellars the other Australian member of the crew.

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



ACTION COPY

R.A.A.F. Form A.14
(R.A.F. Form 683)
(Revised October, 1941.)

CYPHER MESSAGE

4818
Y.38

Serial No. 27 JUL 1943

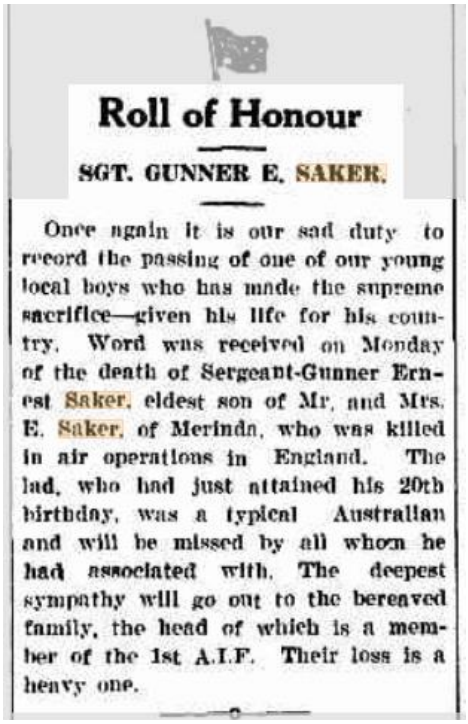
AIR FORCE HEADQUARTERS CYPHER OFFICE

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

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

AL.79 CAS.255 JULY 26

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 PCX.759 AUSCAS 034 JULY 23 REFERS



Roll of Honour

SGT. GUNNER E. SAKER.

Once again it is our sad duty to record the passing of one of our young local boys who has made the supreme sacrifice—given his life for his country. Word was received on Monday of the death of Sergeant-Gunner Ernest Saker, eldest son of Mr. and Mrs. E. Saker, of Merinda, who was killed in air operations in England. The lad, who had just attained his 20th birthday, was a typical Australian and will be missed by all whom he had associated with. The deepest sympathy will go out to the bereaved family, the head of which is a member of the 1st A.I.F. Their loss is a heavy one.

On Tuesday 27 July 1943, The Bowen Independent included the report left about the death of Sgt Gunner Saker, aged 20.

His death was also recorded in the Courier-Mail, Brisbane on Friday 13 August 1943.

Air Casualties - Sgt. E. H. B. Saker - Merinda killed in an aircraft accident in England.



AIR CASUALTIES

The latest R.A.A.F. casualty list includes the names of 10 Queenslanders, as follows:—

OVERSEAS

KILLED, AIRCRAFT ACCIDENT
SAKER, Sgt. E. H. B., Merinda.
SLAUGHTER, P/O A. J., West End.

PREVIOUSLY MISSING, PRESUMED DEAD
REES, Sgt. A. G., Nanango.

MISSING, BELIEVED KILLED
ARMOUR, Sgt. R. D., Clayfield.
CHAPMAN, Sgt. A. E., Ashgrove.
KANE-MAGUIRE, F/Sgt. N. A. P., Ashgrove.

PRISONER OF WAR
RENNICK, Sgt. R. L., Chinchilla.

AUSTRALIA AND AUSTRALIAN TERRITORY

KILLED, AIRCRAFT ACCIDENT
GOYNE, L.A.C. A. K., Warwick.
PATERSON, P/O D. S., Barcaldine.

DIED OF INJURIES
McDONALD, A.C.1 K., Townsville.



The Bowen War Memorial is a dominant feature in the streetscape. The concrete memorial sits on a stepped base of rough hewn grey granite. Above this base is a pedestal which is divided into four sections. The pedestal has a digger statue at the top. On each face of the first section of the pedestal there is a marble plaque bearing the leaded names of the 43 fallen men from the First World War. At the base of each face is a marble plaque with leaded names and a granite plaque with gold lettering bearing the names of the 26 fallen men from the Second World War.



All Australian casualty names are projected onto the exterior of the Hall of memory. Ernest Henry Benjamin Saker's name will be projected on: Sun 28 February 2021 at 4:09am and Sat 22 May 2021 at 6:41pm

His name is also on panel 129 in the Commemorative Area at the Australian War Memorial (as indicated by the poppy on the plan).

