

Sergeant Ronald Kenneth Bannear

18th of September 1918 – 10th of August 1942

SN 407817



Figure 1: Ronald Kenneth Bannear, Date unknown

Premiers ANZAC Spirit School Prize 2024

Burra Community School, Burra

Ashley Edwards, Year 10

Part A



Figure 1: Johann and Dorothea Bennier (Bennier, 2011)

In hope of a better life and with 5 children in tow, Johann and Dorothea Bennier left all that was familiar and quite likely beloved in their native land of Germany, to come to the other side of the world. Their final destination, South Australia, held yet to be experienced joys, successes, hardships and struggles as they established their new life and expanded their horizons and their family. Over the following generations the Bannears (spelling changed from Bennier by deep poll), established themselves as hard working and successful business owners and it was into this family culture of industriousness that Ronald Kenneth Bannear was born.

On the 27th of September 1918 parents William Fredrich (grandson of Johann and Dorothea) and Margret Bannear welcomed their eighth child, Ronald Kenneth into the world. His older siblings Harry, Morris, Stanley, Ruby, and Thelma, all welcomed him with open arms. Sadly, Elsie (dec. 1907) and Doris (dec. 1917) never got to meet their wonderful brother.

Ronald Bannear spent the first part of his education at Saddleworth Public School from 1924-1931. After completing primary school, he then went to Riverton District High School from 1932-1933. He excelled in English Literature, Geography Drawing, Arithmetic, Maths Part i, Maths Part ii and Bookkeeping but was unable to grasp the concepts needed for shorthand. He also liked to spend his spare time playing sports such as tennis, football, and swimming.



Figure 2: The Bannear shop after it had been purchased by Stan Crawford (Saddleworth District Community Association, 2017)

Ronald worked with his father who, in the early 1900's, purchased a lot of land and built a Corner Store on 20 Belvidere Road, Saddleworth that was a "greengrocers and merchandise store" (Saddleworth District Community Association, 2017)(figure 2). They had a tearoom on the east side of the store which attracted the custom of many farmers wives when they came into town. They also carried furniture, timber, stones for road work and carted goods to and from Adelaide. Ronald's father William was multiskilled and very talented as he was an electrician, tinsmith, plume petrol seller and a very successful business owner. Ronald was able to learn many of these valuable skills from him, setting him up to be as equally talented and successful as his father. They operated this store until 1926 when they sold their stock to Stan Crawford and set up a bicycle repair shop on another lot. This shop contained "bicycle and motor accessories and a billiard saloon at the back" (Bennier, 2011). His father also had a motor garage at the back of the greengrocer's store that he used to own. He was a labourer and tinsmith by trade as he built houses and water tanks with his father as well.



Figure 3: Ronald Bannear in his RAAF uniform

Their family was highly involved in their community and known by all. This was demonstrated through the shops they built and the many community events they catered for, as well as the many sports events they attended (Bennier, 2011).

Less than a year after WW2 started Ronald was keen to join up and so in June of 1940, at the age of 21, he put in an application for the Royal Australian Air Force. With his application being successful Ronald was initially put into the R.A.A.F reserves, but on the 6th of January 1941 he

was placed in the permanent R.A.A.F Forces and was appointed “to No. 4 Initial training School, Victor Harbor” (National Archives of Australia, 2024).

Ronald trained in many different locations such as Mount Brackan, Ballarat, Victor Harbor and Port Pirie, South Australia. Finally, ready to be posted Ronald embarked from Sydney on the 18th of September 1941 and arrived in England on the 4th of November 1941 (figure 4).

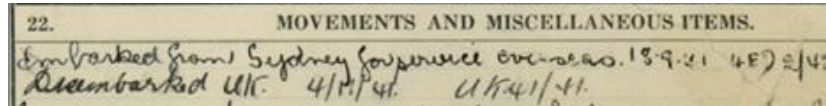


Figure 4: The dates Ronald left Australia and arrived in England (National Archives of Australia, 2024)

Following a brief time of training in Scotland Ronald was posted in York as part of the Reconnaissance Unit. This involved a crew of airmen flying over enemy countries and taking photos of their landscape, resources, and infrastructure. This enabled those in command of the armed forces to coordinate attacks based on the photo footage they obtained. To do these flights they used a Hudson air bomber because it was too slow to be used in combat.



Figure 6: Ronald on the far left with his mates at one of the courses he did

Ronald was quite an adventurous person and enjoyed visiting new places. While he was on leave, he took in the scenery at many local sights including that of Ireland, Belfast, Dublin, Giants Causeway and Guinness Brewery. He usually travelled with his cobbler which is an “Australian term for a pal” (Vocabulary.com, 2024) or brother, Jack Ramsey. Ronald and Jack shared a room together which allowed them to form a very close bond.

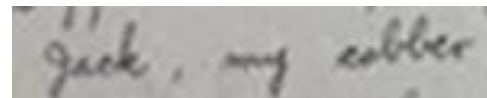


Figure 5: Letter from Ronald to his sister Thelma

During Ronald’s service time he completed many courses such as an Annual Musketeer course on the 1st of August 1942 and passed with class “A”, No. 10 Wireless Air Gunner course on the 5th of February 1941 which he scored the highest in out of 92 participants. Through the course Ronald did, he was able to connect with other Air Force Servicemen (figure 6). He also had the honour of being awarded the Air Gunner Badge on the 22nd of August and received the 1939/45-star Atlantic defence medal (figure 7, 8 and 9).

16. Decorations, Medals, Mentions & Badges.	
Decorations, etc.	Authority
A/G Badge 22/8 1939/45 star Atlantic Defence	22095 43/41 HBO 10/46
WAR MEDAL 1939/45	

Figure 7: Ronald Bannear's service records showing his Special Commendations (National Archives of Australia, 2024)



Figure 9: 1939/45-star Atlantic defence medal (Australian Government Defence, N.D.)



Figure 8: Air Gunner Badge (Australian War Memorial, 2024)

While in England he was with the 48th Squadron and on 22nd of the August 1941, Ronald was promoted to Sergeant.

In the many missions that he completed he was a Wireless Operator and an Air Gunner. On the 10th of August 1942 while conducting a patrol over Norway in a Lockheed Hudson FH427, Ronald and his crew were attacked by 5 enemy fighters. Unable to withstand such heavy enemy assault, Ronald's plane succumbed, and it was presumed that it crashed off the coast of Norway. Ronald's flight Sergeant, Captain Gordon Roy Watts's body was washed ashore and retrieved by German soldiers. His identification was sent to the Red Cross, and he was buried on Virga Island off the south west coast of Norway. Sadly, none of the bodies of the other crew members including Ronald Kenneth Bannear were ever retrieved from this tragic event. Ronald was declared missing, presumed dead, on the 10th of August 1942.



Figure 10: Ronald Kenneth Bannear Newspaper notice about his death (The News, Adelaide, 1942)

Ronald was a very beloved and cherished family member of the Bannear family as evidenced by his sibling Ruby, Thelma and Stanley all naming their child Ronald in tribute to their brother who heroically died for King and Country.



Figure 11: Riverton & District High School Roll of Honour WW2 (Monument Australia, 2010)

Sergeant Ronald Kenneth Bannear is remembered at several locations in Australia and overseas:

- Adelaide WW2 Wall of Remembrance
- Australian War Memorial Roll of Honour
- Riverton & District High School Roll of Honour WW2
- Runnymede Air Force Memorial
- Saddleworth Institute RAAF Plaque
- Saddleworth War Memorial
- The Australian War Memorial in Canberra

Ronald reflected the ANZAC characteristic of courage by every mission that he flew. He was part of the Aerial Reconnaissance Unit which is highly dangerous as it involves flying directly into enemy territory. During times of war countries have high levels of defence around their borders, so flying these missions would have been decidedly dangerous and the risk of being shot down was extremely high. Having the guts to get aboard a plane and fly over a country where you could be shot down at any moment, never to return to your home country and see your family again, takes great courage. Given that the life expectancy of a wireless operator in an aircraft during World War 2 was only “six weeks” (Commonwealth War Graves Commission, 2024), every time Ronald got into that aircraft he would have felt fear, worry or underlying stress of potentially not surviving the mission. He would have had to have ‘dug deep’ and found the mental fortitude to focus on the mission and not the fear in order to be an effective crew man. Ronald upheld every aspect of the oath that he took from beginning to end (figure 11).



Figure 12: Runnymede Memorial in England where Ronald was commemorated (Virtual War Memorial, N.D.)

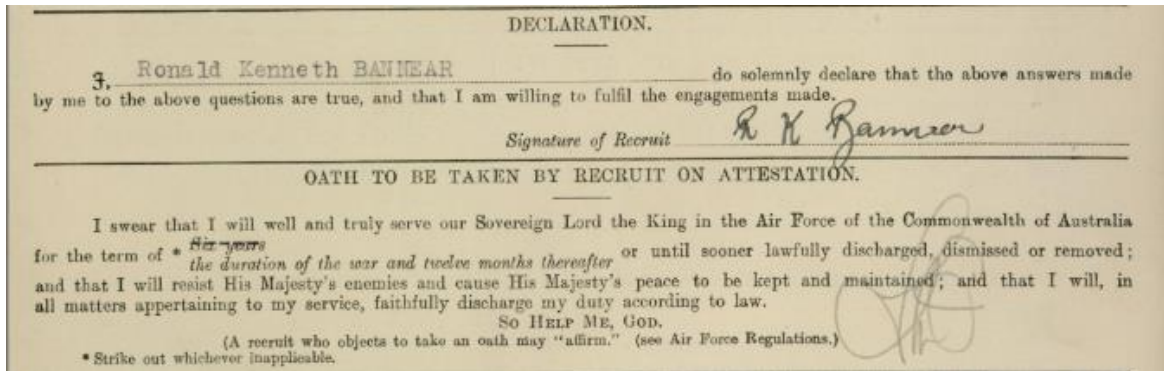


Figure 13: Ronald's Personal Records Oath to his country (National Archives of Australia, 2024)

This would have taken great courage to overcome thoughts and feelings of despondency and fear so that he could do the best job possible in order to increase he and his crew's chances of survival.

Ronald reflected the ANZAC spirit of mateship in a number of ways. He developed a very strong brotherly bond with his roommate Jack Ramsey. They travelled together while they had time off which would have meant they were a great support to each other and a distraction from thinking about the ominous task of fighting the war. Their mateship was clearly evident through the amount of time they spent together, and the comradeship lessened the blow of being in this 'nightmare' called war, together. He was mentioned several times in his letters back home to his family in Australia. Ronald's spirit of mateship would have been further evident in his relationship with the crew he did missions with. In order for a fighting aircraft crew to be effective each member needed to know that the other members of the crew 'had their back'. They had to work together as a team and support each other constantly during a mission especially if their plane was hit and they had to go into damage control to try to avoid impending disaster. The level of mateship in this instance would have been extremely important as the crew fought together to complete their mission and stay alive.

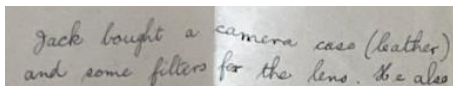


Figure 14: Letter from Ronald to his sister Thelma mentioning his friend Jack

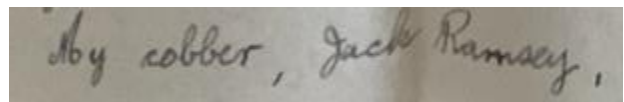


Figure 15: Letter from Ronald to his sister Thelma showing true mateship

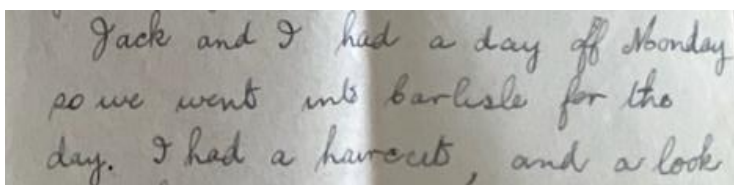


Figure 16: Letter from Ronald to his sister Thelma about him and his friend Jack traveling together

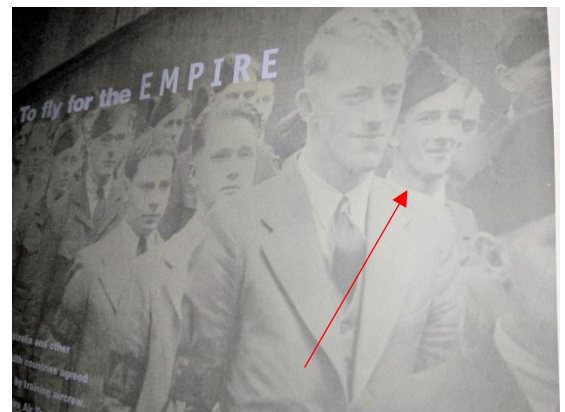


Figure 17: Ronald marching with other R.A.A.F servicemen (Virtual War Memorial, N.D.)

The word count does not include referencing, bibliography, and brief captions under photographs/tables/maps etc as per guidelines: 1527 words

Part B

When starting this project, I decided that I wanted to research someone within my family tree. This was important to me because I really value family and I wanted to feel connected to the person that I was researching. I have relatives on each side of my family that are very invested in researching family history, so I considered it wouldn't be too difficult to find the information needed. I asked my father who very quickly referred me onto my grandfather as he knew there was someone within his family who served.

I went to my grandfather and talked with him and found out that his uncle, (my Great-Great-Uncle) Sergeant Ronald Kenneth Bannear served in World War 2 as a Wireless Operator and Air Gunner in the Royal Australian Air Force.

The first challenge I faced was getting the contact details of the family members that had information about Ronald. I was able to get help from my grandfather, Ronald Edwards about Ronald Bannear. He was able to provide me with a family history book on the Bannears. This proved very useful as it not only had information about him but also about his ancestors. I was able to gather an understanding of what Ronald's life was like through the stories and photos in the book.

Through the book I found out that there were other nieces and nephews of Ronald Bannear still alive. I was able to get in touch with Ronald Wurst, (Ronald Bannear's nephew) and get more details of his life. Mr. Wurst was able to pass me on to his nephew Simon Wurst who received all of the letters that Thelma, his grandmother received from Ronald Bannear. He was able to send me photos of some of the letters and of Ronald Bannear. It was very interesting to be able to read the reply that Ronald sent back to Thelma, most of it was just general information, but quite entertaining and interesting. At times he did mention information about his activities – like those of how much time he was going to be spending in Victor Harbor and his next transfer location. This was very intriguing as I was able to learn about him as a person and not just someone from my family tree. It was also interesting to uncover his thoughts and feelings through a very difficult period in the world's history.

I interviewed my grandfather as his mother, Ruby Edwards, was Ronald Bannear's sister and he told me many stories about their family. I also went to the National archives and got a lot of the history of Ronald's time in the Royal Australian Air Force. This was very fascinating as it was never known in detail of his contribution to the world's freedom.

Through the information I gathered I was able write my piece on Sergeant Ronald Kenneth Bannear which I hope is an intriguing memoir of his life and the great sacrifice that he made for his country.

Words: 498

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Additional Primary Sources

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Personal letters from Ronald Kenneth Bannear to his brother- Stanley Norman Bannear, various dates

Personal letters from Ronald Kenneth Bannear to his mother - Amy Margaret Bannear, January 1st, 1941