

Lawrence was born 10 Sep 1919 in St John's, Newfoundland alongside his twin brother Wilfred. The brothers were born to Froim (Frank) and Esther nee Lusher. Frank and Esther had a further two children Marion in 1922 and Cyril in 1929.

Frank was born on 20 Oct 1888 in Gaysin in the Ukraine and travelled to New York. He married Esther, who was born in Canada on 26 Oct 1918 in New York and they emigrated to St John's, Newfoundland where Lawrence and Wilfred were born the following year. Frank became a dealer in cow hides, calf skins, seal skins and furs. He also was a tanner of leather.

Robin McGrath's book, *Salt Fish & Shmattes*, along with the research of Memorial University historian Gerhard Bassler shows how Newfoundland's immigration policy towards Jewish refugees of The Third Reich was arguably the most tight-fisted of any place where they sought shelter. Out of 12,000 Jews who applied to immigrate or were part of proposals made by Jewish refugee organizations, less than 10 were admitted. One of those proposals, made by Froim Banikhin in 1936, could have just started Newfoundland's ailing economy.

Banikhin was a local Jewish entrepreneur, a member of one of the approximately 20 Jewish families living in Newfoundland at the time, who proposed bringing in several thousand highly skilled German Jewish refugees to develop a hydroelectric plant at Churchill Falls and exploit the area's iron ore deposits. Dr Douglas Wilansky, who knew Banikhin while growing up in St. John's, says he is confident that Banikhin would have carried out his plan had he been given the chance. "Banikhin was a serious kind of guy who got things done," Wilansky recalls in an interview with *The Report*.

He certainly had the business track record to prove it. A decade earlier, Banikhin had noticed that local fishermen along the Labrador coast were using the abundant supply of matjes herring in the Gulf of St. Lawrence as bait. For the Ukraine-born Banikhin, who was aware of the huge market potential that herring had in Europe, seeing the fish "used for bait or thrown to the dogs was like watching someone tear up hundred dollar bills to start a fire," says McGrath. Banikhin went on to set up 29 herring factories that employed hundreds of local workers.

Lawrence attended school at Bishop Field College, Bond Street in St John's, and then attended Memorial University College from 1938 – 1939. When war was declared Lawrence was the second man from St John's to volunteer after his friend. His records state: 'They were a 'local' who enlisted into the Royal Air Force in Newfoundland. They joined after August 1940. Was appointed as a Class F Reservist'

Lawrence joined the RAF and his twin Wilfred joined the Army. Wilfred's family have stated that he served for 6 years in heavy artillery in the British Army. Both Lawrence and Wilfred were stationed in the UK for a while. Lawrence wrote to his mother 'that he loved to fly over Ireland, it was so lush and green'. Their sister Marion worked as a civilian secretary for the head of the Naval Armaments Depot.

Whilst serving in the RAF, Lawrence was given the nicknames Benny and Barney as seen in the book extract below:

*'On 3 February 1942, the remaining aircrews of the original four-squadron wing that had been assigned to the defence of Singapore had arrived in Karachi, together with a cargo of crated Hurricanes. With the victorious Japanese fleet now poised to enter the Bay of Bengal, it was decided that the first eight Hurricanes to be assembled were to be flown to Colombo to defend Ceylon. The pilots assigned were Flight Lieutenant Peter Fletcher, a Rhodesian; Flying Officer Joe Edwards, a Canadian; Pilot Officer Ian Adamson, a Scot from the Argentine who wore the shoulder flashes BLAV (British Latin American Volunteers); Pilot Officer Gordon Conway; Warrant Officer Thomas Taggart*

Young, an American in RAF uniform; Flight Sergeants Barney Banikhin and Bill Higgins; and Sergeant 'Ginger' Hicks. It would have been hard to find a more cosmopolitan group.

We lost two pilots at this time. To test Japanese reaction a sweep was flown over Chittagong, on the far side of the Bay of Bengal. On the way back Barney Banikhin made a successful forced landing, but Hamish Weatherall developed a bad glycol leak and was killed when he spun in, apparently overcome by fumes. A fortnight later I handed over my aircraft to Piers Worrall, who took over readiness in it. I had flown it twice the previous day, but when he took off later in a scramble he lost his engine in a dead cut and was burned to death when he crashed into a pillbox at the end of the runway.

In mid-1942, No 136 Squadron moved to Red Road, a strip in the centre of Calcutta, from where it could operate as a single unit. Because of the severe camber on Red Road, the Hurricanes normally took off singly on the crown of the road to assist in keeping straight. Failure to do so could have disastrous consequences, as Gordon Conway discovered one day when, while taking off as number two of a pair, he failed to keep on top of the camber and progressively drifted to port as engine torque and adverse camber combined. Just as he got airborne the port wing took the top off a sentry box that had foolishly been sited right on the edge of the road (it never was again). Thanks to the Hurricane's ruggedness and some skilful flying, Conway got down with several feet of more losses in 1942 when Barney Banikhin flew into the ground during a practice attack and was killed instantly, and a month later the squadron's American pilot, Thomas Taggart Young, hit a tree in the same exercise area and died from his injuries three days later'.

Extract taken from: **Jackson, Robert. Through the Eyes of the World's Fighter Aces: The Greatest Fighter Pilots of World War Two. Pen & Sword Books.**

On the 27 May 1942, Lawrence made a forced landing due to engine failure.

Sgt. Lawrence "Benny" Banikhin:

<b>Date of Crash</b>	27 May 42	<b>Aircraft Name</b>	Hurricane IIB	<b>Serial Number</b>	BG952
<b>Unit</b>	136 Sqdn	<b>Operating Airfield</b>	Alipore	<b>Country</b>	India
<b>Aircrew details</b>	Sgt Lawrence Banikhin(798501)				
<b>Details</b>	4m S of Berandi, Bengal, Engine cut, crashed in forced landing. Twelve Ac left for Chittagong for Special Op from Alipore. When approaching islands, SGt Banikhin broke formation and headed back towards Alipore. Not seen again. He reported by wire saying he made a forced landing due to engine failure and was unserviceable where he broke formation				
<b>Source</b>					

This event was recorded in the local St John's newspaper

## **JUNE 6TH, 1942**

### **CASUALTY REPORT**

BANIKHIN. Lawrence, Sergeant No. 798051 R.A.F. Missing as the result of air operations. Next of kin father, Mr. Frank Banikhin, "Torrington" Waterford Bridge Road, St. John's, Newfoundland.

## **JUNE 22ND, 1942**

### **CASUALTY REPORT**

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