















Biography

Wing Commander James Francis "Stocky" Edwards DFC bar, DFM, MID Order of Canada

Photos by courtesy James F. Edwards

Text by courtesy of Pat Murphy, Volunteer of Y2-K Restoration Team, Comox Aviation Museum,

Canada

James Francis "Stocky" Edwards joined the Royal Canadian Air Force almost as soon as he graduated from high school in 1940; he hitchhiked to the RCAF recruiting centre in Saskatoon to enlist from his farm home in Battleford Saskatchewan, a distance of about 100 miles. Like many young Canadian men, getting into the war seemed like the right thing to do.

Stocky Edwards had never driven a car nor been within a hundred yards of an airplane he did posses a strong desire to serve his country and to do it flying Spitfires. He played hockey in his spare time and was considered very athletic, he was determined, very responsible and like most Canadian farm boys of very hardy stock.

Without knowing it, he already possessed some skills learned as a young hunter that would serve him well as a fighter pilot, Edwards was proficient with a 22 rifle and 12 gauge shotgun, he learned to shoot when he was 9 years old and it was often his responsibility to provide meat for the family table, wing shooting came easy to Stocky and the shooting skills that he had learned on the Canadian Prairie would serve him well in North Africa at the controls of a Kittyhawk, in the Mediterranean and over the Skies of Northern Europe in his favorite fighter, the beautiful Spitfire, James Francis "Stocky" Edwards would become one of Canada's highest scoring aces of the Second World War.



Eventually the call came from the RCAF to report for basic training; Edwards trained at several Canadian training bases and eventually received his wings, in August 1941 Stocky was posted overseas for operational training at 55 OTU in Usworth, England. After OTU he was assigned to 94 Squadron RAF Squadron in North Africa for a short spell then on to 260 Squadron RAF flying Kittyhawks.

On his first operational sortie while escorting Boston bombers on March 2, 1942 Edwards shot down his first enemy aircraft. It would be the first of many. Stocky Edwards would fly Kittyhawks until posted to the Middle East Central Gunnery School at El Ballah. Egypt where he trained other pilots in the dog fighting and shooting skills he had learned in the Western Desert.

Stocky Edwards was posted to 417 Squadron RCAF in December 1943 this time to his first RCAF Squadron and he would fly Mk VIII Spitfires. Based out of Marcianise Italy, two weeks later he would become flight commander of 92 Squadron RAF out of the same Italian base supporting ground forces involved in the Anzio beachhead, 92 Squadron was also flying Mk VIII Spitfires. In March 1944 Edwards was posted again this time to command 274 Squadron RAF, after experiencing a crash in the central mountains of Italy Stocky was hospitalized for several days, he returned to his Squadron only to find that he was being repatriated to England with 80 and 229 Squadrons to prepare for the D-Day landings in France.

The squadrons formed a new Spitfire Wing at Hornchurch flying Mk IX's they operated from Detling and later West Malling flying sweeps and escort missions over the continent, during these sweeps Stocky flew 75 missions and did not encounter a single enemy aircraft.

In August 1944 Stocky converted to Tempest fighters and flew operations against Doodle Bugs until he was repatriated to Canada for some rest, Edwards had now completed 2 combat tours. After 5 months of staff duties Stocky was re-posted to Europe and assigned to lead 127 Canadian Spitfire Wing. Edwards led the Wing and continued combat sorties until the Germans surrendered in May of 1945. Officially Edwards was credited with 16 1/2 victories but as a modest man he did not claim all his victories, his autobiography written by himself and Michel Lavigne titled" Kittyhawks over the Sand" chronicles his victories listing the date and location, they are as follows, 22 destroyed, 2 shared destroyed, 6 probable, 15 damaged, 12 aircraft destroyed on ground and over 200 military vehicles destroyed on the ground. Stocky Edwards was a magnificent pilot and skilled marksmen, he managed a (single victory or damage) on 18 different occasions and double victory seven times and a triple on 3 occasions.









The pictures of Stocky in the Spitfire was taken in Germany in May 1945 while sitting in TD147 after leading the wing on a flight over some German cities



The scramble takeoff shows Stocky leading 403 Squadron Spitfires out over a flight over Germany to discourage any resistance to the Allied troops after the War had ended. The 403 Squadron Spitfires are now displaying the 3 coloured spinner to celebrate the end of the war, the spinners were painted red, white and blue, the 403 codes were KH and are visible on a couple of the Spits. Stocky's JFE is out front and preparing for a mass take off.



Stocky Edwards flew many different types of Allied Aircraft including several different captured types. His log book lists 600 hours on Kittyhawks, 450 on Spitfires (Mk V's Mk VIII's, Mk IX's, Mk XVI's Mk XIV). 20 Hours on Tempests, 3 hours and 30 minutes on Bf 109, Fw 190 2 hours and 45 minutes, Ju 87 one hour and four hours on a Bf 108. Stocky also piloted a He 111 while in the desert. Stocky Edwards also flew an American P-47 and had some stick time on a P-51 Mustang. After the War Stocky was interviewed for a publication and was asked, what was his favorite aircraft, Stocky did not hesitate, "In my opinion, the Mk IX Spitfire was the finest fighter ever built". Stocky Edwards should know he flew many different types during his Air Force career.

Stocky Edwards remained in the RCAF after the Second World War, he would fly Vampires and Sabre jets until he retired in September, 1971, he is still active in Spitfire affairs and is part of the Y2-K Spitfire restoration team in Comox British Columbia, he enjoys his retirement and spends many hours fishing, golfing and gardening at his home on Vancouver Island

Canada.



Photo taken in the 1950's when Stocky flew Sabre jets with the RCAF



Photo was taken at the Vancouver airport in April of 2006 where Stocky was reunited with a Spitfire for a documentry film that is being produced about Stocky Edwards life, it happens to be a Mk 14 TZ138. It was the first time Stocky had been in the cockpit of a Spitfire since August 1945.





The Spitfire Mk IX with two large beer barrels "Modification "XXX" on the wing bomb carriers Reference: Book "Spitfire The History" - Page 315

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