



Summer 2022

VIMM Newsletter

Vancouver Island Military Museum

Canadair Sabre and Pilot Sets New Records – 1953.

By Angus Scully

In July 1953, a Canadian jet fighter with a revolutionary Canadian designed and built engine, broke the sound barrier in the sky over Edwards Air Force Base in California, setting a new world record for its pilot.

The Pilot

The pilot was the famous American aviator Jackie Cochrane, and in the Mark 3 Canadair Sabre, she became the first woman to break the sound barrier. In the same plane that summer, she set several other new records. Cochrane and other women showed that women could be high performance pilots equal to men and helped pave the way for later military and civilian women pilots.

Many biographies of Jackie Cochrane state that the RCAF loaned her the Sabre so that she could make the record attempt, after being refused

a plane by the USAF. Not so! Cochrane was a famous pilot, perhaps the most famous female pilot in the world in the era from 1930 to the 1950s – after Amelia Earhart. She was an active member of The Ninety-Nines: International Organization of Women Pilots and in 1937 she

had set a world air speed record for women. During the Second World War, she was the first woman to fly a bomber across the Atlantic, flew for the British Air Transport Authority, and was in command of the American Women Airforce Service Pilots. In 1945, she was awarded the American Distinguished Service Medal for her contributions to the war effort. She then joined the US Air Force Reserve as a Lieutenant Colonel. Cochrane wanted to challenge the world speed record for women that had been set by Jacqueline Auriol of France. The USAF refused to allow her to try in an USAF plane, so, the ever-determined Cochrane then used her husband's influence to get access to a Canadian plane. Her husband was a financier and had contacts with the General Dynamics Company that in turn owned Canadair in Montreal.



Chuck Yeager, Jackie Cochrane, Canadair Mk 3 Sabre.

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The Plane

In 1952, Canadair obtained the licence to build the North American F-86 Sabre for the RCAF and other countries. At the same time, the A.V. Roe Company in Toronto was developing the Orenda jet engines. A single Canadair Sabre was converted to test the new Orenda engines, and this was called the Mark 3 Sabre. It was scheduled for testing at the advanced facilities at Edwards Air Force Base in California. With pressure from its parent company, Canadair agreed to hire Jackie Cochrane as a temporary test pilot. The RCAF, paying for the development of the Orenda and Sabre, did have a say, and like the USAF, could have stopped Cochrane's attempt. However, Air Vice Marshal Wilf Curtis met with Cochrane and saw the potential to publicize the new Orenda engine, and the RCAF.

Curtis approached the Minister of National Defence, Brooke Claxton, who did not give formal approval, but did not object either. Curtis gave his blessing to Canadair's proposal, saying of Cochrane, "She was comparable in skill, technical knowledge, and courage to the finest male pilots of our time." Jackie Cochrane flew to Montreal to be hired as a "part-time flying consultant" and to qualify as a Sabre pilot. She donated her wages to the RCAF Benevolent Fund. In its July 15, 1953 issue, Maclean's Magazine covered the story and the new world records set by Jackie Cochrane



The Sabre in flight with Cochrane at the controls. Note: as a Canadair test plane, the Sabre did not have RCAF markings.

who was the first man to break the sound barrier and is widely remembered today through the book and film, *The Right Stuff*.

Cochrane's Records Flying the Canadair Mk 3 Sabre

On May 18, 1953, in the Mark 3 Canadair Sabre, Jackie Cochrane broke the world's air speed record for a closed course 100 km flight, averaging 1048.29 km/hr. On May 23 she broke the closed course 500 km speed record. On June 3 Cochrane broke the straight away speed record over 15 km at a speed of 1078.26 km/hr.

While setting these absolute speed records, that is, not limited to women, Jackie Cochrane became the first woman to break the sound barrier. She did this three times in dives from 14 630 meters altitude (48 000 ft) breaking the sound barrier of 1223.1 km/hr (760 miles/hour)

The Records

The Mark 3 was flown to California by Canadair chief test pilot Bill Longhurst, joined by a Canadair support team of sixteen, including Fred Asconi, another Canadian test pilot. At Edwards, the team met, and collaborated with Chuck Yeager, the American test pilot

Cochrane was usually not interested in "women's" records but unlike her absolute records that could be taken away from her when broken by others, the "first woman to break the sound barrier" record was her's forever. Jackie Cochrane was a world beater. So was the Orenda engine and the Canadair Sabre.

Vice President's Message

With the gradual relaxing of Covid restrictions by the Province of British Columbia, we expect the summer season to be a busy one for the museum. We are continuing with the reduced hours of operation until construction of the new Marriott Courtyard Hotel, being built adjacent to the museum, is nearer completion - now scheduled for December 2022.

Visitor numbers for the first six months of the year have been steadily increasing which is very encouraging and bodes well for the coming season. Tourism Nanaimo began an advertising programme, titled Rediscover Nanaimo, earlier in the year which encourages local residents and visitors to spend their time discovering the many interesting destinations right on their own doorsteps and, it seems to be working! Spring Break, in early May, was especially busy this year due to many families from British Columbia, who would normally travel out of province, deciding to vacation at home.

With respect to new exhibits at the museum, I am happy to report that the WWI Fighter Ace exhibit should be completed in the next few weeks. All the relevant material to finish the display is now in the hands of the printer. The exhibit will document and illustrate the history and achievements of three of Central Vancouver Island's World War One fighter pilots: Joseph Fall from Lake Cowichan, Charles Hickey from Parksville, and Osborne Orr from Nanaimo. The display will be beside the existing display on Nanaimo's own Raymond Collishaw.

The retirement of Director Phil Harris earlier in the year left a vacancy on the board of directors which will be filled by Angus Scully who has accepted the position of director for a two year period. Angus has been our newsletter editor for several years as well as a volunteer on the Thursday morning shift. He is a very welcome addition to the seven-member-board of directors.

On the subject of volunteers, we are delighted to once again be celebrating the museum's annual summer BBQ for our hard-working volunteer staff. Due to Covid restrictions last year, we were forced to cancel both the summer BBQ and the Christmas lunch. This event for the volunteers and spouses will be held once again at the Grand Hotel on June 9th.

By Brian McFadden

Did You Know?

Major Deanna Brasseur and Captain Jane Foster of the RCAF, flying CF-18s, became the first women in the world to be pilots in operational jet fighter squadrons



Medal Mounting

The VIMM will gladly mount your medals in court mounting or in a frame. Contact us for further information and prices.



The Story of Two Fine Young Eagles

By Greg Devenish

Canadians can be proud of the contribution Canadian aircrews made in WWI, WWII, Korea, the Persian Gulf, Afghanistan, Libya, and more recently in Iraq. Two brothers, Jerry and Rod Smith, from Regina, Saskatchewan, were typical of thousands of Canadians who flocked to RCAF recruiting depots during the Second World War, all wanting to be fighter pilots. This is their story of courage, loyalty, tragedy, and joy.



P/O "Jerry" Smith in his Spitfire Mk 5B Tropical



F/O Rod Smith RCAF, DFC and Bar. Rod scored 13 victories in the air including six enemy aircraft in a single week! (Note the DFC ribbon on Rod's tunic.)

Both brothers completed their flight training in Canada. Upon graduation, Rod was posted to 412 RCAF squadron. Jerry was posted to 152 RAF squadron. Jerry, like his brother, was involved in fighter sweeps over France and in escorting bombers. Both brothers tried to keep contact with each other, but this proved difficult, especially after Jerry was posted to Malta.

Malta is an island in the Mediterranean Sea, between Italy and North Africa. Constantly attacked by the Italian and German air forces, Malta desperately needed reinforcements. In May 1942, the aircraft carriers HMS Eagle and USS Wasp were sent east from Gibraltar loaded with 63 Spitfires. It was too dangerous for these ships to go all the way to Malta, so they were to launch their planes while some distance away. On 9 May, the carriers launched their Spitfires, a land-based fighters, on a one way 600-mile (965 km) trip to Malta.

Jerry was part of that operation and flew from the Wasp. Ahead of him in line to take off was fellow Canadian, Bob Sherrington. Tragedy struck when Sherrington's Spitfire plunged into the sea and the Wasp ran over it. Jerry almost had the same fate but coaxed his fighter into the air, only to discover problems with his fuel tanks - there was no way he could make Malta. Ditching was the protocol, but Jerry wasn't too keen on this as the Spitfire could sink quickly. Jerry did what no other Spitfire pilot was able to do - he landed his Spitfire back on the carrier. Douglas Fairbanks, a movie star and American pilot, was a witness, and was so impressed he presented Jerry with a pair of U.S Navy wings. Jerry wrote in his diary, "... The Americans made a terrific fuss and presented me with Navy Wings and a cake." Jerry finally did make it to Malta a few weeks later, flying from HMS Eagle. He reported to RAF 126 Squadron.



A dramatic photo - Jerry landing his Spitfire on USS Wasp.

Then in July, Rod made his own flight to Malta, from HMS Eagle. When he landed, Rod was very surprised to see his brother. He had not known where Jerry had been posted. Rod was also assigned to 126 squadron and the brothers were inseparable. Rod described one sortie in his logbook:

‘...Made port quarter attack on left hand side of five JU -88s at at 18000’...opening fire at 250-150 yards, firing six second burst. Port Engine burst into flames which spread to fuselage. One of The crew bailed out... (it) crashed...Jerry got one too... Happy Day”

On 10 August, Jerry was scrambled to engage attacking German aircraft. He was last seen engaging a JU-88 bomber but did not return. Rod was pretty shaken up and carried out patrols to find his brother, but to no avail. Jerry was 21 years old. In October 1942, Rod was shot down and baled-out into the Mediterranean. After contracting jaundice Rod spent most of 1943 instructing and on leave in Canada.

In 1944, Rod was posted to RCAF 412 Squadron in England, and on 7 July shot down a FW 190 and had two more victories during Operation Market

Garden. In September, Rod was given command of RCAF 401 Squadron. By war’s end Rod had achieved 13 victories and one shared. He was twice awarded the DFC.

Rod returned to Canada and became a lawyer and a professional engineer in Vancouver. He was an active member of the Canadian Fighter Pilots Association. Rod Smith died in 2002.

There is a final chapter. Following Rod’s death, his sister Wendy, travelled to Malta to carry out Rod’s wishes that some of his ashes be spread over the waters close to where Jerry had gone missing in 1941. Wendy met a pilot, Charlie Brown, who flew Spitfires and was in Malta at the same time. Upon hearing Wendy’s story about her brother’s wishes he agreed to fly over the same spot that Jerry was last seen and drop Rod’s ashes out of a Spitfire. Pat Murphy, Spitfire historian and VIMM director wrote,

“The following day, the Mark V Spitfire ...took off and flew west towards Sicily. Once over the same area as Jerry’s disappearance Brown tipped the Spitfire over one wing, slid the canopy back, and poured the ashes from the cockpit...After a lapse of 60 years, Rod had his last flight in a Spitfire, and the Smith brothers were once again together.”

Mossies Put the Kibosh on Goering and Goebbels

By Brian McFadden

January 30th, 1943, was the tenth anniversary of the rise to power of Hitler and the Nazis. To coincide with commemorative rallies being held throughout Germany, the British RAF planned a surprise for Nazi leaders – Reichsmarschall Herman Goering and the Third Reich Propaganda Minister, Joseph Goebbels. Both men were planning to deliver speeches to the German people from the main broadcasting station in Berlin. Goering was to commence his address at 11 am and Goebbels would speak to the nation at 2 pm in the afternoon.

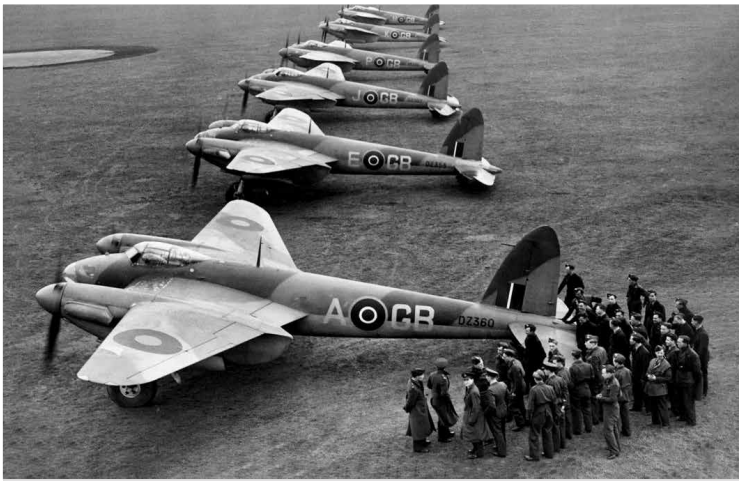
At the moment when Goering approached the lectern to deliver his speech, three Mosquito Fighter Bombers from the Royal Air Force 105 Squadron carried out a low-level attack on the headquarters of the German State broadcasting company. The noise of the bombing and anti-aircraft fire from German guns could be heard over the airwaves throughout the country. It was almost an hour before Goering could return to the podium and, knowing that

plane would ever fly over the Reich or bomb German cities. To add insult to injury, in the afternoon of the same day, three more Mosquitoes from 139 Squadron appeared in the skies over Berlin and, at exactly 2 pm, once again bombs were dropped on the broadcasting station just as the propaganda minister was about to commence his 'pep' talk. The second attack was not as disruptive as the first, but once again proved that Germany's capital city was not immune to attacks by Allied aircraft. Sadly, one aircraft was lost during these raids.



Herman Goering, head of the German Air Force, was enraged by the Mossie attack

Mosquito DZ367 of 105 Squadron flown by Squadron Leader D.F. Darling was shot down near the German town of Altengrabow. Darling and his navigator Flying Officer, William Wright were both killed



Mosquitoes and crew prepare for an attack on Germany

Hitler would be monitoring the broadcast, the Reichsmarschall was reportedly boiling with rage and humiliation. Goering had been the principal architect of the Blitz campaign carried out by the Luftwaffe on British cities. This was the first daylight raid on the German capital and the success of the raid dispelled Goering's claim that no enemy

Commemorative Watch Honouring the Goering Raid by Mosquito aircraft from 105 & 139 Squadrons RAF. The watch is set at 11:00 am the exact time of the raid.



A commemorative watch honouring the raid on January 30th, 1943, by Mosquito Fighter Bombers from 105 and 139 Squadrons RAF, was recently donated to the Vancouver Island Military Museum. The watch has been set to 11 am, the exact time of the first attack

A Canadian Legend: James Francis “Stocky” Edwards

By Pat Murphy, VIMM Volunteer

Stocky Edwards, RCAF ace and flying legend, died in May in Comox BC, aged 100. He will be dearly missed. The Vancouver Island Military Museum has the largest tribute display honoring Canadians that flew the famous Spitfire fighters during the Second World War. It was because of Stocky Edwards influence the display was created. Stocky Edwards and I met in the year 2000 while both of us were part of the Y2-K Spitfire restoration project at the Comox Air Base. I had been building scale plastic models since I was in grade school and had never built an aircraft flown by a Canadian in WW2, partly because model kits did not supply details for RCAF aircraft, and books with such details were not common. With Stocky’s guidance I was able to get on the right track and start creating models of Canadian Spitfire pilots.

My first Canadian Spitfire model was of a plane that Stocky Edwards flew - a Mk VIII Spitfire that he flew while fighting in Italy. It was fun to build, and I was proud to have honoured such a great guy. Stocky suggested several more Canadian pilots and soon I was building Spitfires nonstop. After about 3 years of work, I had a small display in the Y2-K Spitfire hanger along with pictures of the pilots. All of the pilots of the models were friends of Stocky. Some lived on Vancouver Island and were regular visitors to the project. When I left the restoration project, I took my Spitfire models home to display them in a glass cabinet. I kept building Spitfires flown by Canadians and loved the history that went with each build. The collection consisted of about 20 Spitfires at the time.

In 2009 I donated the collection to the Vancouver Island Military Museum when it was still in the Rutherford Mall. President Roger Bird had a very nice cabinet built to safely display them along with enough room to show a photo of each pilot and some details on the RCAF Squadron he flew with and his home town. Not long after I became part of the volunteer staff at the museum, I helped with the move to our present location and in 2011 we were in downtown Nanaimo, overlooking the waterfront in a spacious building with what has turned out to be one of the finest military museums in Canada.

The Spitfire display has grown to 70 aircraft and honours some of Canada’s bravest fighters. I thank Stocky for getting me started. May he rest in peace.



Stocky Edwards holding a model, built by Pat Murphy, of the Kittyhawk fighter he flew in North Africa.



Stocky Edwards in front of his Spitfire



The VIMM Spitfire display inspired by Stocky Edwards

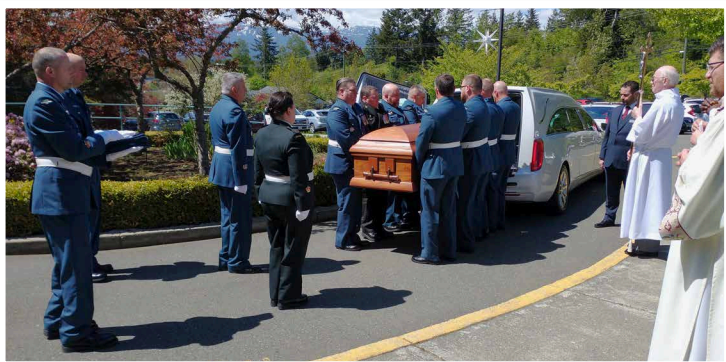
DISPATCHES

from VIMM



A Superb Leader

Wing Commander James Francis Edwards, RCAF.



Funeral of James Francis "Stocky" Edwards in Comox BC. He was probably the Commonwealth's last surviving ace from the Second World War

- Distinguished Flying Medal, Distinguished Flying Cross and Bar, Mentioned in Dispatches, Legion of Honour (France).
- Order of Canada, 2004.
- Member of the Canadian Aviation Hall of Fame, 2013.

"Stocky" Edwards, from Saskatchewan, joined the RCAF at age 19 and on his first combat mission, aged 20, shot down a German Messerschmidt fighter. He had a total of 19 confirmed victories during WW2. He spent 32 years in the RCAF and retired as a Wing Commander.

Ace Island

VIMM's new display on First World War fighter aces from Vancouver Island will be opening soon. Set up beside the display about Raymond Collishaw, it tells the story of Osborne Orr, Charlie Hickey, and Joseph Fall. Of special note are the medals of Osborne Orr, including his DFC, donated to the VIMM by James Thayer and Constance Thayer of Seattle.



Osborne Orr's DFC. A rare item.

Popular With Visitors- DShK Machine Gun

On display at the VIMM and seen regularly on news coverage of the Russian invasion of Ukraine, this heavy machine gun is used by both Russian and Ukrainian forces.



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