“The Forgotten Hero of the Forgotten War”



**CAPT E. ROYCE WILLIAMS USN, Retired**

The Korean War has become a footnote in history, the forgotten war between WWII and Vietnam. The involvement of U.S. forces was limited to a NATO “Police Action” to stop the communist expansion into Asia. Still, for the tens of thousands that served and lost their lives in the Korean War, it is anything but forgotten. U.S. Congress never declared war against Korea and the Soviets never officially entered the war. Nevertheless, the United States provided 88% of the United Nation’s (UN) military personnel while the Soviet Union secretly supported the North Korean communist intention to overthrow their southern countrymen.

The memories of the Korean War still linger in the hearts of those who have served, including Naval Aviator, Captain E. Royce Williams, USN, Retired. For the first time in history, Soviet pilots secretly flew against NATO and U.S. forces. In an exhausting 35 minute dogfight against 7 Soviet MiGs, LT Williams then, became the only American Aviator to single-handedly shoot down 4 Russian MiGs in a single sortie. A record that most likely will never be broken. His heroic actions were kept classified for nearly fifty years. Post- Cold War, the Russian government confirmed the loss of the 4 MiG-15s and disclosed the names of the four pilots he shot down: Captain Belyakov, Captain Vandalov, Lieutenant Pakhomkin and Lieutenant Tarshinov. This is the account of LT Williams’s heroic actions that are yet to be reviewed for the full honor and recognition he earned so many years ago.

On November 18th, 1952, LT Williams participated in a 3 carrier major strike against the Hoeryong industrial complex very near the North Korea-Russian border. Expecting reprisal from the North Koreans, the U.S.S. Oriskany launched a Combat Air Patrol (CAP) into the blustery skies above the Sea of Japan. The Patrol was in the midst of a blizzard, where the cloud cover was at 400 feet and the visibility was terribly low. Division Leader, Lieutenant Claire Elwood and his wingman LTJG John Middletown with Section Leader, LT Royce Williams and his wingman LTJG David Rowlands served as CAP that day. Soon after the CAP was launched, the Combat Information Center (CIC) reported multiple bogeys approaching inbound, 80 miles north of Task Force 77.

The Combat Air Patrol finally broke through the clouds of the howling snowstorm at around 12,000 feet. As they advanced upward, Section Leader, LT Williams spotted seven contrails well above 50,000 feet. The bogeys were quickly identified and reported as MiG-15s. Moments later, the Flight Leader, reported a fuel pump warning light. The CIC ordered LT Elwood and his wingman, LTJG Middleton to return to CAP duty directly above the U.S.S. Oriskany. The defense of Task Force 77 was in the hands of LT Williams who took the Lead and LTJG Rowlands as his wingman. Although, the two F9F-5 Panthers were outnumbered and out classed on maneuverability and acceleration, they boldly continued the pursuit against the 7 MiGs. The MiGs came over them and reversed, presumably heading back to their base at Vladivostok. LT Williams continued to track and climb to 26,000 feet, when suddenly, the MiGs split into two groups to corner the F9Fs. One group of four MiGs came straight in firing from the 10 o’clock position, as the other 3 MiGs circled around to bracket them.

LT Williams turned sharply into the enemy and the 4 MiGs over shot, missing their targets. When they passed, LT Williams pulled a hard left turn and kicked in the rudder to get his sight on the number four MiG. After a short burst of fire, the MiG went down. His wingman, LTJG Rowlands, followed the plane as it dropped out of formation, leaving LT Williams alone against 6 Soviet adversaries. Complete chaos ensued… LT Williams was in the fight of his life, working at every moment to keep the MiGs off his tail. He utilized every Guns Defense possible as he reversed and jinked against the far superior aircraft, attempting to stay clear and keep the MiGs from locking down on his six o’clock position.

**1 Down, 6 to Go!** LT Williams immediately chased after the three remaining MiGs from the group, trying to maneuver with them. His Panther was no match to the Soviet MiGs far superior speed and rate of climb as they easily zoomed away. One MiG turned around, pointing back at him and quickly disappeared into the bright sun. Williams immediately noticed the other two MiGs had already made their turn and they were coming right at him in a diving attack. LT Williams swiftly turned into them as they fired out of range. As the lead MiG approached 2,000 feet, he quickly broke away to avoid the opposing fire. The other MiG followed right behind the lead, which gave Williams the opportunity to get him into his sights. He fired at the enemy until he disappeared underneath his wings. It was a presumed hit, since Williams didn’t have the luxury to follow for confirmation.

**5 Left!** “Then the Fight was on. They were no longer in formation. They were flying to position themselves to attack me one at a time,” Williams recalls. The opposing MiGs were determined to down the sole Grumman Panther. One of the MiGs came back around and LT Williams reversed to put his gun sights on him. As the MiG turned, he was able to fire at him. The blast was so abrupt, Lt. Williams had to maneuver violently to avoid swallowing the exploding MiG parts.

**3 Down!** “There was a lot of maneuvering, some shooting and mostly dodging going on,” remembers Williams. During the 35 minute dog-fight, the MiGs would over shoot and occasionally they did not climb, which gave Williams the opportunity to track and fire at them. While LT Williams was tracking a smoking MiG to finish him off, he looked back and saw another MiG coming in. He put in a lot of rudder and kicked the airplane over to give the opposition a tough shot. LT Williams’s luck was finally running out and the MiG hit him with a burst of fire from his 37mm cannon. He was hit in the wing section and accessory section of the Pratt and Whitney Jet engine. The relentless MiG came back around and settled on his tail to ensure the kill. LT Williams had to use both hands on the stick to maneuver properly, because he had lost two of his 3 controls, the ailerons and the rudder. The elevator still worked perfectly, so he could only porpoise to pull up and push over hard, similar to a pitch and tuck maneuver. He could see the bullets fly by him as the attacker shot away at him. Out of ammo and riddled with holes, LT Williams headed back home as he took to the cloud cover and they lost sight of each other in the snow storm.

**Carrier Bound, Crash Course:** LT Williams came out of the clouds at about 400 feet. At that point, he was flying too low to eject safely and the freezing waters of the Sea of Japan would have taken him within 15 minutes in his immersion suit. As the Panther drew closer for a troubled landing, the destroyers escorting Task Force 77, opened friendly fire on LT Williams mistaking him for an enemy aircraft. “Fortunately, I was low enough that they didn’t have a chance to really aim, so nobody hit me,” Williams explained. His Panther would stall below 170 knots (normal carrier approach speed is at 120 knots) which forced him to come in at 200 miles an hour for an inevitable crash landing. His immediate focus was to keep control of the aircraft and use alternate backup systems to lower the landing gear and tail hook. The U.S.S. Oriskany’s Commanding Officer, Captain Courtney Shands was alerted and adjusted the carrier away from the wind to try and compensate for the F9F’s out-of-control speed and inability to maneuver properly. Incredibly, LT Williams was able to land safely engaging the number 3 wire, which was much attributed to the sturdy construction of the Grumman aircraft. Miraculously, LT Williams was unscathed and confided, “I had God on my side.”

On the flight deck, the plane captain rushed to congratulate the Lieutenant and the badly damaged aircraft became an immediate specimen of interest. 263 perforations were circled and counted, ranging from a foot wide to minor cuts in the fuselage. The Grumman F9F-5 Panther that fought so valiantly was irrevocably damaged and they pushed it over the side into the ocean, to it’s final resting place.

LT Williams headed to the Ready Room for debriefing, however the Intelligence Officer delayed the investigation, because he wanted to wait for the Flight Leader. In the meantime, the tension grew higher due to pressure from Washington, awaiting a full report on the incident. “They already knew there was some sort of rumble with the Soviets and they wanted the answers, right now!” Williams affirmed. The Intelligence Officer caved to Washington and sent out a “phony” report based upon the very limited information he received and the lack of details and understanding of the engagement. Williams was credited with a kill and a probable-damaged, LTJG Middleton was credited with a kill and William’s wingman, Dave Rowlands was given a probable.

A week later, the U.S.S. Oriskany arrived in Yokosuka, Japan where LT Williams was ordered to see Vice Admiral Robert P. Briscoe, Commander Naval Forces Far East. Admiral Briscoe informed the Lieutenant that the United States has a new capability called the NSA, National Security Agency. They were covertly aboard the U.S.S. Helena, right off Vladivostok on their first mission. The NSA told Admiral Briscoe to tell that young man that he got at least three. They were able to follow the MiGs from take-off until the remnant MiGs came back. Admiral Briscoe warned Williams to never speak of the incident for fear of escalating the Korean conflict into World War III.

A month later, Admiral J.J. Clark and LT Williams met with President-elect Eisenhower in Seoul, Korea. Eisenhower specifically requested a debriefing with LT Williams to discuss “our planes versus theirs.” The bold pilot found himself surrounded by Generals Omar Bradley and Mark Clark, Admiral Arthur Radford, the Secretary of Defense and many other dignitaries. Eisenhower took Williams by the elbow and led him to a nice, comfortable, over-stuffed chair. Then he sat at the edge of the chair and wrapped his arm around the young hero. “Well, young man, before we get down to business, don’t you think we ought to have drink? Don’t you think?” Eisenhower encouraged. “Yes, Sir,” Williams agreed. “Well, we have bourbon and scotch, water and soda. My son John is the bartender. What would you like?” I said, “Bourbon and water, please.” The President nudged, “We have awfully good scotch son.” “Well Sir, I prefer bourbon and water.” The President insisted, “Young man, we have great, great scotch.” “Well Sir, the truth is I prefer bourbon and water.” “Lieutenant! We’ve got the world’s finest scotch,” the President demanded. Williams said, “Mr. President, I drink bourbon and water.” The President reluctantly conceded and turned to his son, “John, give him a bourbon and water.” “Needless to say, I learned quickly from my experience. I should have taken the scotch. So, in honor of Ike, the next time I had the opportunity, I ordered scotch and it prevails to this day,” Williams admitted with a great big grin.

Captain E. Royce Williams, USN Retired, flew over 220 missions mainly in Korea and Vietnam. He served our country for over thirty years and retired in 1980. Williams has not yet received the full recognition for his acts of valor that he gave in defense of our great nation over 63 years ago. We encourage all readers to reach out to our local politicians for support and join our plea for Captain Williams to be re-reviewed for recognition for his heroic acts that were above and beyond the call of duty on November 18th, 1952.

91 year old, Captain Royce Williams is featured in the upcoming series ‘Heroes in History,’ a collection of veteran stories, told by the heroes who lived through them…before they are lost forever. Please enjoy Captain Williams’s amazing story at: [www.loveamazinglyproductions.com/heroes.html](http://www.loveamazinglyproductions.com/heroes.html)

Join us this May 14th for the annual San Diego Ride for Vets and the kick-off for the Run/Ride to the Wall that will include a nationwide campaign to petition for E. Royce Williams to receive re-review for recognition for the Medal of Honor. We have the opportunity to ensure that Captain E. Royce Williams will not be “The Forgotten Hero of The Forgotten War.” We are in need of sponsorships and support.

For more information, please visit: [www.loveamazinglyproductions.com/sd-ride-for-vets.html](http://www.loveamazinglyproductions.com/sd-ride-for-vets.html)

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