

Flight Lieutenant James “Jim” McCaw DFC



Jim McCaw was born in Oamaru in 1919 and grew up on the family farm in the Hakataramea Valley. He completed his Dip Ag at Lincoln and joined the Air Force, training at Taieri in September 1941. He spent time in Wigram and deployed in May 1942.

Jim ended up in England (and not in Canada where he was supposed to train on multi-engines). He went into Hurricane consolidation before posting to 486 Squadron and flying Typhoons. The squadron was mainly New Zealanders and did a lot of raids into France. “Anything that moved was fair game” Jim told his son.

His particular favourite was trains. Getting over the French coast was the challenge, flying low level over the coast and pulling up over shore defences. The squadron took heavy losses.

In May 1944 the squadron was equipped with the new aircraft, the Tempest V. Around the same time the V1 flying bombs showed up, flying over the coast and into London. The squadron was posted to Newchurch, Romney Marsh with orders to intercept.

Jim shot down twenty V1 flying bombs and had one shared “kill”. On one memorable occasion (caught on film by his wing camera) he was too close to a bomb when he shot it, flying through the explosion with the cockpit momentarily filling with flames and the heat removing the paint from much of the aircraft.

The citation for his DFC credits him with a large number of sorties (308 in total) involving successful attacks on railways, mechanical transports and targets on the ground as well as attacks on shipping. “He is the most efficient flight commander, whose ability and keenness have been reflected in the fine fighting qualities of his flight.”

These outstanding qualities of leadership, sharpness and vision, together with a highly combative nature, are the hallmarks of another McCaw; Jim’s grandson who happens to be New Zealand’s most successful All Blacks captain.

After the war Jim returned to farming in the Hakataramea, married local girl Cathy Trotter, with whom he fathered a gliding dynasty. Jim and Cathy eventually retired to Wanaka where Jim was actively involved with the Fighter Pilots Museum.