



# ACTIONS SPEAK LOUDER THAN MEDALS

## The Royce Williams Story

### EDUCATION KIT

# 1

## What does it mean when Actions Speak Louder than Medals?

**The secret was kept for nearly fifty years** — on November 18, 1952, just south of Vladivostok, U.S.S.R. (Union of Soviet Socialist Republics), a single American Navy pilot named Royce Williams got into a historic dogfight with seven superior Soviet fighter planes and ended up **shooting down at least four**.

One would think that such a fight would have ended up as big news, especially since it was extraordinarily long (38 minutes) and involved the two biggest powers in the world (U.S.S.R. and the United States). But because the Soviets and the U.S. were already working to negotiate peace between North and South Korea, U.S. leaders decided to “Classify” the mission and keep it quiet lest it embarrass the Soviets and escalate the war. The dogfight was obfuscated, official records rewritten, medals quietly awarded and then, everyone involved was ordered to keep their mouths shut.

In 1992, when most of the moment was Declassified, Williams was finally able to share the story and then, he decided to just tell his wife. Any desire for notoriety had long passed — Royce was happy to be a simple, unsung citizen, friend and family-member to people he loved, even when the action was worthy great honor and recognition.

Yet, a story like this one can't be hidden forever. As records became known, this amazing moment where one man did his duty in spite of overwhelming odds was rediscovered.

Today, many believe Royce Williams deserves the nation's highest military honor, the Congressional Medal of Honor. Royce, however, is just happy that he was able to do his job well.

**For Royce, success is excelling at the obligations at-hand without doing so to win fame or fortune.**

**ROYCE WILLIAMS SAYS IT BEST**  
See Page 6 for online interview



PHOTO: Royce Williams

**E. Royce Williams, age 8**

### Royce Williams - “Korean War Hero” BACKGROUND AND FACTS

Birthplace: Wilmot, South Dakota  
Birth date: April 4, 1925  
Occupation: Military pilot

**FACTS:**

- Born in South Dakota, grew up in Minnesota
- Full name: Elmer Royce Williams
- Father was a grocer and craftsman
- Mother was a homemaker
- 1 brother, 4 sisters
- Earned Eagle Scout in 1940
- Flew combat in the Korean War and Vietnam War
- Worked to see that the families of Vietnam War POWs received care and information

Published by



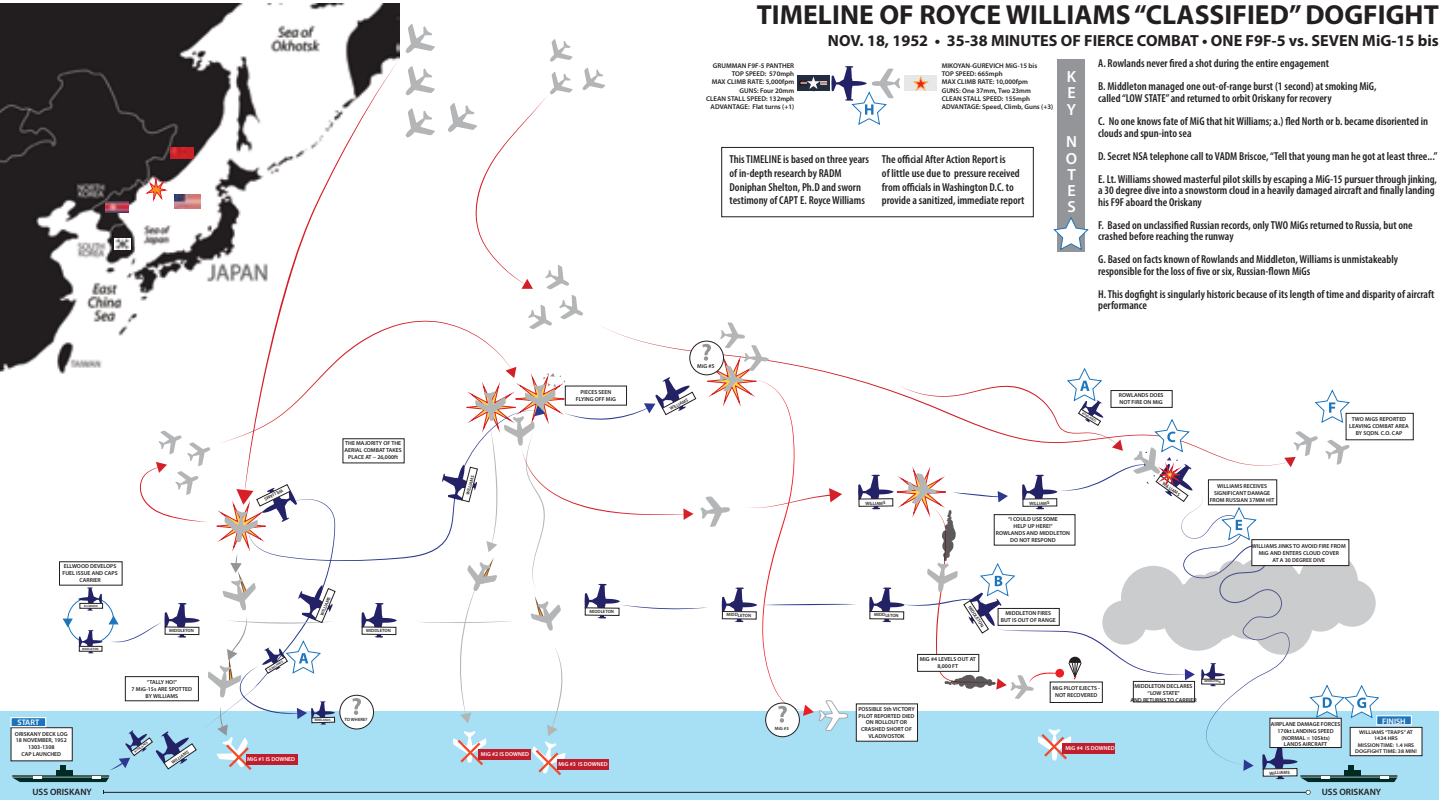
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© JOHN MOLLISON.COM - Based on original timeline-map by RADM Doniphon Shelton, Ph.D USN (ret) [DOWNLOAD THE TIMELINE BY CLICKING HERE](#)

## ILLUSTRATING WILLIAMS' SECRET, CLASSIFIED ACTION

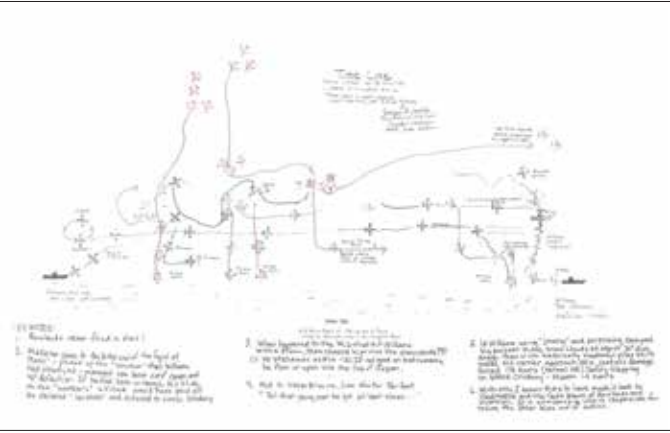


IMAGE: RADM SHELTON'S ORIGINAL HAND DRAWN TIMELINE

When Rear Admiral (RADM) Doniphon Shelton, Ph.D learned of Royce Williams' amazing dogfight, he knew right-away that others needed a way to visualize exactly what happened. As a Navy fighter pilot himself, RADM Shelton was also uniquely qualified to diagram the dogfight.

Noticing that one of the most significant aspects of the dogfight was the elapsed time — *most historic dogfights are over in moments while Williams' took 38 minutes* — RADM Shelton chose to create the diagram based on that factor and called it a "Timeline." Read left to right, the Timeline shows what happened from takeoff to landing.

RADM Shelton has compiled extensive research to support awarding Williams the Medal of Honor. Part of this research was the Timeline map. The original was made by hand-drawing arrows and using rubber-stamp airplanes — Williams swore to its accuracy and it has become an important resource in sharing the story. In 2020, the Timeline was refreshed as shown above for ease in printing and distribution.



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# 3



North Korean flag



South Korean flag



Geo-political map showing primary Cold War influencers  
source: Natural Earth Data Map



"Mark 4" Atomic Bomb  
c. 1950  
source: unknown, presumed public domain



Current image showing night-view of North Korea and South Korea — which country seems to be most active?  
source: NASA



Ghostly sculptures from the National Korean Veterans Memorial, Washington D.C.  
source: John Mollison

## 5 reasons the Korean War should always be remembered

### 1. The Korean War is still going on

Though an Armistice between North and South Korea was agreed upon in 1953, a formal ceasing of hostilities has not been declared. Both Koreas say they want peace but cannot agree on what that looks like.

### 2. The Korean War was a war over two different governments

When WWII ended, many new nations were established, especially in former European colonies in Southeast Asia. As these new nations required significant inputs of resources to stabilize and grow, decisions to follow Communist or Capitalist philosophies were made to secure aid and guidance. China and the Soviet Union (allied with the United States during WWII) promoted Communism while the United States and other United Nations countries advocated for national autonomy or Capitalism. North Korean leaders decided to follow Communism, South Korea, Capitalism.

### 3. The Korean War could have grown far worse

At the beginning of the Korean War, the United States was easily the world's dominant "nuclear power." As casualties in the Korean War mounted and the prospect of Communist dominance in Southeast Asia grew, American war planners considered using the atomic bomb to quickly cease hostilities. The result could have been a nuclear response from the Soviet Union and full-scale war between the two powers.

### 4. The Korean War flip-flopped Koreas

At the beginning of the Korean War, North Korea was seen as more industrialized and had the stronger economy while the South was more agrarian. Today, South Korea is one of the top 15 economies in the world, providing household name goods around the globe while North Korea is dependent on other nations for basic supplies.

### 5. The Korean War created millions of (sobering) memories

South Korean, U.S. and United Nations military casualties (killed, missing and wounded) are greater than 760,000. North Korean, Chinese and Soviet Union military casualties are greater than 1,200,000. Yet, an estimated 2-3 million civilians were also killed. Over 1,500,000 civilians fled North Korea to live in the South. In the end, untold millions of lives were traumatically affected by the war.

(source: various, wiki)



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## Royce Williams' Favorite Airplane!

### NAME:

The Grumman Aircraft Engineering Corporation began naming their aircraft after cats in WWII. Grumman "Cat Names" include: Wildcat, Hellcat, Bearcat, Panther, Cougar, Tiger, Jaguar, Tigercat and Tomcat.

### THE PAINT JOB

Starting later in WWII, U.S. Navy aircraft were painted dark blue. This practice ended in 1955 when the airplanes began to be painted white and light gray.

### SILVER EDGES:

Since U.S. Navy and Marine aircraft spend a lot of time near salt water, chips in paint can cause corrosion, quickly. A special silver paint was created to protect especially sensitive parts of the aircraft.

### FLASHY PAINT:

The U.S. Navy squadron VF-781 painted red lightning bolt motifs on the nose and wingtips.

### A COMMON WEAKNESS:

The F9F's main weakness was common to most early jets — lack of power. The F9F Panther's Soviet counterpart, the MiG-15bis, had an engine that was almost twice as powerful as the Panther's.

### SAME NAME, DIFFERENT CAT:

The F9F naming system applies to the Panther and Cougar names; essentially the Cougar is a Panther with new wings, tail and engine, resulting in a jump in aircraft performance. Spotting the difference is easy - an F9F Cougar has swept wings while the F9F Panther has straight wings.

### BREATHING and BRAKING:

Air was delivered to the jet engine via inlets built into the wing roots.

Perforated dive-brakes were located directly under the cockpit; these were dropped to slow the airplane down for landing or while diving

### FIRE POWER:

The F9F Panther was armed with four 20mm explosive-cannon in the nose. As each round would explode on impact, a well-aimed short burst of fire could disable a target in a single moment.

ARTWORK: John Mollison

### SQUADRON NUMBERS EXPLAINED

The squadron Royce Williams served with during his November 18, 1952 dogfight was VF-781. The "V" indicated Navy (VM = Marines), the F means "Fighters" and the number 781 is the Squadron number. VF-781 was created after WWII. However, early in 1953, the Squadron was re-numbered VF-121. Yet, the Squadron mascot, a leaping, flaming black cat over a blue star remained along with the Squadron's slogan, "The Pacemakers." VF-121 was disbanded in 1980.



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PHOTO: John Mollison

## Royce Williams' life is more than just one moment — yours is too.

Today (at age 95) Royce is often asked about his dogfight. But he is even more interested in talking about the friends he made in nearly 40 years of service, his family and his faith in God.

**“I’ve always been a joiner! I like to see where I can contribute, make some friends, learn something new. That’s important for life.”**

Royce believes that a person's life-story is most-meaningful when seen as a series of consistent positive actions rather than a single moment.



Royce Williams retired from the U.S. Navy as a Captain — a Navy Captain is the equivalent a Colonel in all of the other U.S. branches of service



The Silver Star is the United States' 3rd highest award for valor in combat

Royce was awarded this medal for his action on 18 November, 1952 against Russian-flown MiGs



The Distinguished Flying Cross is the United States' 4th highest award for valor in flight

Captain Williams received two DFCs for his service during the Vietnam War



The rank of Eagle is the highest rank in Scouting

Royce became an Eagle Scout in 1940 and remains proud of this achievement



# ACTIONS SPEAK LOUDER THAN MEDALS The Royce Williams Story EDUCATION KIT

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## Why not listen to Royce Williams in his own words?



PHOTO: Old Guys and Their Airplanes

## STORIES ARE BEST TOLD BY THE PEOPLE WHO WERE THERE.

Taking advantage of the benefits provided through studying history is a fundamental aspect of personal success. Though there are excellent books, websites and even movies to help learn history, nothing beats interacting with someone who participated in the moment. Yet, it can be intimidating to talk with others about significant moments in their life, especially difficult moments that are related to war or conflict. To ease that challenge, consider these points:

1. Think about a period of history you're interested in learning about - then ask parents or teachers who they suggest you meet to learn more.
2. Ask questions that require a personal perspective such as, "What did you learn from your experience?" or "Describe your most vivid memory..."
3. If you want to record or photograph your meeting, ask for permission (and let the person know what you intend to do with their story).
4. One conversation may not be enough to understand the person or the moment; try to have at least three meaningful conversations.
5. Getting background information will help build credibility with who you're talking to but be careful to let the other person tell their story without being corrected or interrupted.
6. Be prepared for surprises! You may find that someone's personal story is different than what you've learned elsewhere.
7. You'll acquire humility, wisdom and character through learning about the lives of others so be prepared to share what you learn with others.

Watch a short film and recording of a live interview with Royce at [www.dfcsociety.org/pages/ogta-debriefs](http://www.dfcsociety.org/pages/ogta-debriefs)



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## LEARNING MORE ABOUT CAPTAIN ROYCE WILLIAMS



CAPT E. Royce Williams c. 1975, PHOTO: U.S. Navy

### Some of Royce Williams' decorations

SILVER STAR

LEGION OF MERIT with V device

DISTINGUISHED FLYING CROSS (2)

BRONZE STAR

MERITORIOUS SERVICE MEDAL (2)

AIR MEDAL (11)

NAVY COMMENDATION MEDAL with V device

AMERICAN LEGION MEDAL OF VALOR

### Actions Speak Louder than Medals Education Kit contributors:

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RADM Doniphan Shelton

Royce Williams

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#### Additional support from:

The Distinguished Flying Cross Society

San Diego Air & Space Museum

South Dakota Air & Space Museum

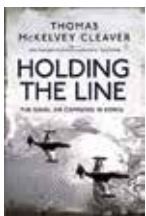
South Dakota Public Broadcasting

Steve Lewandowski

Old Guys and Their Airplanes

(Dalton Coffey, Rick Lingberg)

[www.DFCSociety.org](http://www.DFCSociety.org)



Actions Speak Louder than Medals Educators Kit

<http://www.dfcsociety.org/pages/ogta-debriefs>

Holding the Line - The Naval Air Campaign in Korea History book

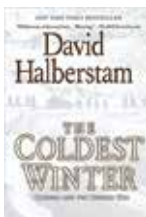
Thomas McKelvey Cleaver



This Kind of War

History book

T.R. Fehrenbach



The Coldest Winter

History book

David Halberstam

The Bridges at Toko-Ri

Movie ----->



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The Distinguished Flying Cross is a military decoration awarded to individuals demonstrate heroism or extraordinary achievement while participating in aerial flight.

One of the missions of the Distinguished Flying Cross Society is to share the heroic stories of its members with the world. Though especially remarkable, General McGee's story is just one of many. If you have any interest in learning more about how ordinary people can prevail under extraordinary challenges, the [DFCSociety.net](http://DFCSociety.net) website is a great resource. Hundreds of DFC citations are available to read.

On behalf of the DFC Society, may Captain Williams story inspire you to do your best without regard to whether you will receive an award or not.

Bruce Huffman  
Chairman, 2020

[www.DFCSociety.org](http://www.DFCSociety.org)