

" Johnnie " James Edgar Johnson (RAF n°83267)

CBE, CB, DSO\*\*\*, DFC\*, Officer in the Order of Leopold,  
 Belgian Croix de Guerre 1940 with Palm,  
 DFC (US), Legion of Merit, Air Medal (US), War Medal 1939-45, 1939-45 Star, ...



James Edgar "Johnnie" Johnson was born on 9th March 1915 at Barrow-upon-Soar, Leicestershire. He trained as a civil engineer and was rejected by the Auxiliary Air Force and the RAF Volunteer Reserve before the war. He eventually joined the Leicestershire Yeomanry Territorial Army, but when war broke out was soon called to the RAFVR to begin flying training, which was completed at 7 OTU, Hawarden in August 1940, before joining 19 Squadron at the end of the month. Johnnie Johnson had arrived with a unit that had no time to train new pilots and he was therefore moved, on 5 September, to 616 (South Yorkshire) Squadron. Here, after a few operational sorties, an old rugby injury, a broken collarbone with attendant trapped nerves, which had been causing him considerable pain, threatened to ground him. His Station Commander (Wing Commander Stephen Hardy), believing he was "yellow", offered him the choice of Training Command, training others on Tiger Moths, or an operation – he chose the operation!! After a stay in hospital, and upon returning to his Squadron in the December, he found that the Tangmere Wing was commanded by the legendary legless ace Douglas Bader and frequently flew in his section, with Alan Smith and "Cocky" Dundas. Johnnie was an eager student, and he learned a great deal about air combat, and leadership, from the flamboyant legless ace who was an inspiring leader. "He taught us the true meaning of courage, spirit and determination," Johnnie explained after Douglas had become a POW. "It was now our task to follow his signposts which pointed the way ahead". He gained a half share in a Do17 in January 1941, but opened his scoring properly in June, destroying a Bf109. He was awarded the DFC and was promoted to Flight Commander. In June 1942 he was awarded a Bar to his DFC and in July took command of 610 (County of Chester) Squadron, then on 19 August led them over the Dieppe raid, where he flew four sorties, got one enemy fighter and shared another. This sortie almost proved to be his last as an Fw190 with Italian markings set him upon. Forbidden to fly below 2,000 feet (ships had been ordered to fire upon anything below this altitude) Johnnie dived and pulled out just above the ships masts. Anti-aircraft fire was intense but he pulled out unscathed. How the Italian Fw190 fared he never knew. In March 1943 he was given command of the Kenley Spitfire Wing (Mk. IX's), which included two Canadian Squadrons, and was awarded a DSO in June. In August this became 127 Wing in the new 2nd Tactical Air Force, which was about to be formed. By September 1943 his tally was 25 and the Canadian Kenley Wing accounted for 60 more victories. In September a Bar was added to the DSO. Between September 1943 and March 1944 he rested in an appointment with the Planning Staff at HQ No. 11 Group. After a six month "rest", he was eager to get back on 'ops' and in March 1944 he was given

command of another Canadian Wing, No. 144 Wing, No. 83 Group of the 2nd Tactical Air Force, a fighter/bomber unit comprised of 441, 442 and 443 Squadrons. This Canadian Wing was also the first unit to be based in Europe and to operate from France after D-Day (B.3 St. Croix-sur-Mer), the dog is his pet Labrador Sally. His decorations at the time are a DSO with two bars and a DFC with one bar. By late June 1944 he surpassed the record 32 victories of "Sailor" Malan, which was highly publicized by the press. Johnnie emphasized "It was the duty of any leader to have their pilots destroy as many enemy aircraft as possible, not gain personal victories" and "Teamwork was essential to ensure a maximum offensive and defensive effectiveness, flushing out and stalking the enemy to bring as many guns to bear as possible". On 7 July he received a second Bar to his DSO. In mid-July 441 Wing was disbanded, this was no reflection on the Wing's performance, however, but was merely the result of a reorganisation whereby surviving Wings were brought up to four-squadron strength, the command of these passing to Group Captains rather than the previous Wing Commanders. 441 Squadron moved to 125 Wing, 442 Squadron to 126 Wing and 443 Squadron to 127 Wing, where Wing Commander Johnson also went to take over from Wing Commander Buckham as Wing Leader. 127 Wing now comprised of 403, 416, 421 and 443 Squadrons, On 23 August, Johnnie shot down two Fw190's and his aircraft was hit for the first time by enemy fire. After the combat, he found himself separated from the Wing (a most dangerous situation) and he proceeded to join a formation of six aircraft after a friendly wing waggle from its leader. He discovered too late that he had inadvertently joined up with a formation of Bf109s! Miraculously he escaped by pulling up and climbing into the sun at full power. When the supercharger kicked in he got the extra boost of speed that he needed and he escaped safely, but not without taking a cannon shell in his wing root. Upon returning to base he obtained another Spitfire and again went right back into combat. On 27 September 1944 Johnson dove out of the sun to claim his 38th and final aerial victory – a Bf109. On 28 March 1945, just after the Rhine crossing "Operation Varsity" Johnnie was promoted to Group Captain and given command of 125 Wing (in a mainly administrative role), then at B.78 Eindhoven, taking over from Group Captain David Scott-Malden who had led the Wing since Normandy. They quickly became the first British Fighter Wing to operate East of the Rhine when they moved to B.106 Twente in Holland. The Wing was equipped with the Spitfire Mk. XIV powered by the 2.050 hp Rolls Royce Griffon engine. This version however did not feel at all like a Spitfire with its propeller rotating in the opposite direction "It was both fast and powerful but it's not a Spitfire anymore" stated Johnson. In April 1945 Johnson led the Wing over Berlin to only encounter Russian aircraft. A few days later the War in Europe ended. Through 515 operational sorties he was fortunate enough to only be holed once. "Johnnie" then took 125 Wing to B.160 Kastrup, near Copenhagen in Denmark – the first British Fighter Wing into Denmark at the end of the war – where he organised a Victory air show for the Danes. He remained in Germany after the war, in command of 124 Wing, during the rest of 1945 and 1946. In 1947 he reverted to his substantive rank of Wing Commander and attended the RCAF Staff College, which prepared him for a string of senior appointments. He had an exchange tour with the USAF in 1948, serving in Korea in 1950-51. He flew reconnaissance missions in Douglas B-26 Invaders and fighter-bomber sorties in the Lockheed F-80 Shooting Star, winning the US Air Medal and Legion of Merit, though he did not score any kills. He returned in 1952 to command RAF Wildenrath in Germany; he was promoted Group Captain in 1954, and with 'Jamie' Rankin and Peter Thompson, flew one of the last three Spitfires in RAF service on their final service flight, and served at the MOD until 1957. He was Station Commander, RAF Cottesmore between 1957-1960 and was awarded the CBE in June 1960, having been promoted to Air Commodore. Then Senior Air Staff Officer at No. 3 Group at Mildenhall and in 1963 AOC Air Forces Middle East at Aden and was promoted Air Vice-Marshal. In 1965 he was awarded a CB. Air Vice-Marshal "Johnnie" Johnson retired from the RAF in March 1966, becoming Chief Executive of the Johnnie Johnson Housing Trust Ltd. He became Deputy Lord Lieutenant of Leicestershire in 1967, as well as a director of several companies in Canada, South Africa and the UK and a prolific author. The status as the RAF's top-scoring pilot is disputed, with some also claiming either Brendan "Paddy" Finucane or Marmaduke "Pat" Pattle as the highest scorer. During his wartime flying, Johnson flew Spitfires, Marks I, II, V, IX and XIV, and built his tally up mostly in 1943 and 1944, when the Luftwaffe was on the defensive and the Allies ruled the skies over North-West Europe. Johnson surpassed "Sailor" Malan's score in late June 1944; the South Africans' kills had all been scored in the dark days of 1940

to 1941 and whilst "Pat" Pattle's earlier score against the Italian's (with 80 Squadron in North Africa/Greece), and German's (with 33 Squadron in Greece), were documented in the Squadron's Operational Record Book's, the loss of the combined 33/80 Squadron records, in the April 1941 retreat in Greece, meant many cannot be substantiated, but is provisionally put at 50 destroyed, 2 shared destroyed, 7 and 1 shared probable. What is truly amazing about "Johnnie" Johnson's 'score' is that ALL 38 victories were against single engine fighters ranking him as the top-scoring Allied Ace of the Western Front. Johnson was also one of the highest decorated pilots to emerge from the War. Apart from his high kill score, Johnson gained the respect of the Canadians, so much so that they insisted that he wear "Canada" shoulder flashes, and moulded the Kenley Wing, which was made up of mostly Canadian Squadrons, into a formidable fighting force.

(source: Allan Hillman)

His claims are :

15/01/1941	1/2 Do-217 Damaged	near North Coates (616 Sqn)
26/06/1941	1 Bf-109E	Gravelines (616 Sqn)
04/07/1941	1 Bf-109E Damaged	Gravelines (616 Sqn)
06/07/1941	1 Bf-109E	S Dunkirk (616 Sqn)
14/07/1941	1 Bf-109F	(616 Sqn)
21/07/1941	1/2 Bf-109 Probable	Merville area (616 Sqn)
23/07/1941	1 Bf-109 Damaged	off Boulogne (616 Sqn)
09/08/1941	1 Bf-109F	Bethune area (616 Sqn)
09/08/1941	1/2 Bf-109F	Bethune area (616 Sqn)
21/08/1941	1 Bf-109E Probable	E Le Touquet (616 Sqn)
04/09/1941	1/2 Bf-109E Probable	off Le Touquet (616 Sqn)
21/09/1941	2 Bf-109F	near Le Touquet (616 Sqn)
15/04/1942	1 Fw-190 Damaged	near Le Touquet (616 Sqn)
19/08/1942	1 Fw-190	Dieppe (610 Sqn)
19/08/1942	1/3 Bf-109F	Dieppe (610 Sqn)
19/08/1942	1/2 Fw-190 Damaged	Dieppe (610 Sqn)
20/08/1942	1 Fw-190 Probable	off Dieppe (610 Sqn)
13/02/1943	1 Fw-190 Probable	SW Boulogne (610 Sqn)
03/04/1943	1 Fw-190	E Montreuil (Kenley Wing)
05/04/1943	3 Fw-190 Damaged	Ostend - Genth area (Kenley Wing)
11/05/1943	1 Fw-190	Gravelines area (Kenley Wing)
13/05/1943	1 Fw-190	Bercq - Le Touquet (Kenley Wing)
13/05/1943	1/3 Fw-190	mid - Channel (Kenley Wing)
14/05/1943	1 Fw-190	near Nieuport (Kenley Wing)
01/06/1943	1/2 Bf-109	Somme Estuary (Kenley Wing)
15/06/1943	2 Fw-190	Yvetot area (Kenley Wing)
17/06/1943	1 Fw-190	Ypres - St-Omer (Kenley Wing)
24/06/1943	1 Fw-190 Damaged	St-Omer (Kenley Wing)
24/06/1943	1 Fw-190	S Fe... (Kenley Wing)
27/06/1943	1 Fw-190	W St-Omer (Kenley Wing)
15/07/1943	1 Bf-109	Blangy area (Kenley Wing)
25/07/1943	1 Bf-109G	E Schiphol (Kenley Wing)
29/07/1943	1 Bf-109 Damaged	SW Amsterdam (Kenley Wing)
30/07/1943	1/2 Bf-109	W Schiphol (Kenley Wing)
12/08/1943	1/2 Bf-109	Axel area (127 Wing)
12/08/1943	1/2 Bf-109 Damaged	Axel area (127 Wing)
17/08/1943	1/4 Bf-110	N Ghent (127 Wing)
23/08/1943	1 Fw-190	Guesney area (127 Wing)
26/08/1943	1 Fw-190	SW Rouen (127 Wing)
04/09/1943	1 Fw-190	NW Roubaix (127 Wing)
05/09/1943	1 Bf-109 Damaged	Deynze area (127 Wing)
28/03/1944	1/2 Ju-88 on the ground	Dreux Airfield (144 Wing)
25/04/1944	2 Fw-190	Laon area (144 Wing)
03/05/1944	1 Fw-190	Douai area (144 Wing)
16/06/1944	1 Fw-190	NE Villers - Bocage (144 Wing)
22/06/1944	1 Me-109	W Argentin (144 Wing)

28/06/1944	2 Me-109	S Caen (144 Wing)
30/06/1944	1 Me-109	E Gace (144 Wing)
05/07/1944	2 Fw-190	Alencon area (144 Wing)
20/07/1944	1 Fw-190 Damaged	S Argentan (127 Wing)
13/08/1944	2 Fw-190	Seulis area (127 Wing)
27/09/1944	1 Me-109	Rhine (127 Wing)

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