FO Francis Joseph Crowley J/26914 RCAF



Francis, known as Frank and "Stinky" to the squadron, was born on 25 July 1921 in Toronto, Ontario, Canada, the son of Sgt Joseph James Crowley RCAF and Lillian Louise Crowley nee Pelow. Educated at St Francis Xavier School and Brockville Collegiate, Francis was employed as a clerk by F. I. Ritchie, Tobacco Wholesale and Retail, Brockville, Ontario when, in February 1941, he enlisted in the RCAF.

Francis completed his pilot training in Canada in March 1942 with the award of his Wings, and was posted to 111(F) Sqn at RCAF Patricia Bay, British Columbia, transferring to 14(F) Sqn at RCAF Sea Island, British Columbia in May. In August 1942 Francis rejoined 111(F) Sqn, now based at Anchorage, Alaska, where they reinforced the defence of the Canadian and American coastlines, following the Japanese occupation of two Aleutian Islands in June 1942. Commissioned in December 1942, Francis remained with the squadron until they left Canada in January 1944 to join the European campaign, and on their way to the UK, the squadron was renamed 440 Sqn and formed at RAF Ayr, Scotland, followed by a move to RAF Hurn, Hampshire in April 1944.

On 23 May 1944 Francis, flying Typhoon 1B MN637 (I8-Y), was hit by flak and caught fire. He baled out at 900 feet just off Cherbourg reporting on R/T "Here's Stinky baling out". Other squadron aircraft orbited above him in his dinghy until an ASR Walrus picked him up and he returned to the squadron the same day.



On 28 June 1944 the squadron moved to B9 Lantheuil, Calvados, France before moving to B58 Melsbroek, Brussels, Belgium on 6 September 1944. Melsbroek was the scene of Francis's second crash. On 10 September 1944 the engine in Francis's aircraft - Typhoon MN796 - failed at 2500 feet whilst forming up after take-off. He attempted to return to base but had to make a forced landing in a rough field. One wheel broke off on impact, and the aircraft caught fire before coming to rest. Francis was able to escape stating "Heat and flames spurred my efforts and mental reactions". Despite 1st and 2nd degree burns on his face and left hand, Francis returned to ops. By November the squadron was based at B78 Eindhoven, Noord-Brabant, Netherlands.

On 11 November 1944, 440 Sqn was tasked with a railway cutting bombing op, 3 miles east of Rouveen, Overijssel, Netherlands. At 15:20 Francis, operating as "Red 3", departed B58 Eindhoven in Typhoon IB MP124 (18-A), one of eight squadron aircraft.

After releasing his bombs, at 16:00 Francis was hit by enemy flak and exploded in mid-air, crashing two miles east of Rouveen.

Francis is buried in Staphorst (Rouveen) New General Cemetery, Overijssel, Netherlands.

Francis is commemorated on Wall Panel – Not Yet Erected

Francis's brother, FS Paul Anthony Crowley RCAF (AG) was killed on 13 August 1944 on 428 Sqn Lancaster KB 758 (NA-Z) and is commemorated on Panel - 151

Photo Source: findagrave