

# 3,000 HOURS IN A TYPHOON

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INTERVIEW WITH ITALIAN AIR FORCE PILOT, DANIELE LOCATELLI  
HITTING 3,000 EUROFIGHTER FLYING HOURS, AN ELITE MILESTONE





A Colonel with the Italian Air Force, Daniele Locatelli has joined the elite of the elite. He recently passed 3,000 flying hours in the Eurofighter Typhoon — the first time this has been achieved. He's been flying the aircraft for nearly 20 years and is currently based in Kuwait, following an agreement between Italian and Kuwait Air Force (KAF), who are building up their new Eurofighter squadron.

### How did you first get interested in aviation — and in particular, military aviation?

Like many pilots, I was interested in all-things related to soldiering as a child. I remember my father had bought me a photography book featuring Hurricanes and Spitfires from the Second World War and I was completely absorbed by it. From then on, I started to study planes — despite living in Milan where there were no Air Force bases nearby, I'd only see them in newspaper pictures and articles. That was until the Italian Air Force visited my high school and after that, I spent the following few years working towards that kind of career.

### Who were your main influences early on?

I'm the first in my family to join the military, but I have to say that my father was very supportive when I told him I wanted to join the Italian Air Force. He would drive me all over to any kind of air show. My family supported me in getting my Primo Grad too, the basic aviation licence, which helped me before joining the Aeronautica Militare.

### Tell us about your early military experience.

I joined the Air Force aged 22. There is only one window to apply each year in Italy, but thankfully I was accepted. Then it took just 26 months from the moment I joined until I was in an operational squadron. It was very fast.

My first jet was an F-104 Starfighter – she was quite an old lady, but a tough, flying legend. Designed in the 1950s, it was very different from the modern jets. I started at Cameri Air Base, where today the F-35 is built, and then moved to Grosseto Air Base five years later. There I became a backseat flying instructor on the F-104 – it was really interesting.





## Do you recall your first Eurofighter flight? How did it feel, where was it?

Without a doubt. I was fortunate to be one of the very first Italian Air Force pilots to fly in the Eurofighter. It was in May 2004 and after my first take-off, I remember saying “wow” because it was incredible. I was amazed by the agility and manoeuvrability at any level, at almost any speed. It had a really tremendous impact on me and I was very impressed. Another thing was the amount of information you can get, and the many different places in the cockpit you find it. I realised I needed to get my brain working in a different way!

## What have been the highlights of your ITAF career?

In 2004 I was one of the first eight pilots to move to the F-2000 – the name the Italian Air Force gave to the Eurofighter Typhoon – and I was an instructor until 2017, when I arrived in Gioia del Colle to the XII Group (Tiger). During my operational career as a Typhoon pilot, I took part in missions including Libya, Bulgaria, Estonia, Lithuania, Iraq and various Combat Air Patrols in Italy.

Over the years, I flew on all versions and software upgrades of Eurofighter since the beginning, being able to appreciate its continuous evolution. During my service in the Air Force, I experienced a continuous evolution related to the perception of my role, shifting from the “single pilot with a single task” to the “experienced professional” with the higher aim of passing my wealth of experience to younger generations.

Lately, I have been honoured to be chosen by the Italian Air Force as its representative to Kuwait, under a G2G agreement, where I am supporting KAF operations related to the achievement of the operational capabilities of their Typhoon squadron.

## Did you ever think you would hit the 3,000-flying hour mark?

No! I have always loved to fly but I never expected to be able to be on the frontline for so long. But I am well aware of being part of a wider team: I am the lucky one who achieved the goal, but behind these 3,000 flying hours there are many colleagues from the Italian Air Force, their constant commitment and sacrifice.

## The Eurofighter has been your office for some time – how do you rate the Eurofighter as a military jet — what do you think are its strengths?

I think that it is a superb aircraft. I fly it knowing it is one of the top jets. It’s a very advanced plane and it’s incredibly reliable. Wherever I fly, whatever I’m doing, I’m always confident she will let me perform my duties and take me home. It has great performance at different altitudes because the engines are very powerful, and that means we can get the best from different weapons across a range of missions.

