

# Back In the Saddle

## Foreword

It has also been five years, or six since I started with the “Sacha Chronicles”, or really the “Alexei Karmarov” Chronicles. His world was different, due to the fact that doing limited strikes suited me fine, as making missions was never my best. But then again, it let me develop my imagination for writing. Since it’s kinda reminiscent of what Cat had talked about in her latest “Sacha” story. I didn’t really plan at the time to write *anything*, I just got really inspired, and the net result? Pretty good I would assume. I don’t think my stories got as popular as hers, but oh well, I wasn’t looking for fame, I was just looking to write something, as I’m trying to start my own line of stuff, though lack of imagination kinda made me “hitch” on her storyline, which was nice. Given the “co-writing” we did, it was worth the ride to see how it panned out. Lately..., I’ve been deployed to Afghanistan, so sometimes when I’m not real busy, I can concentrate on my other love, Simulation Flying. As of now, I’ve not touched LOMAC:FC in ages, and still remember that, along with EF2000, as my top sims ever. Wings of Israel could never compare, but that is fine, I like the ability to chose very different aircraft, and have some fun.

Now I will admit, reading *My Brother, My Enemy* has reinspired me. I still remember the painful 18+ hours of doing the Ukrainian Splinter scheme for Sacha’s MIG-29, of which after these years, is still looking sharp. Maybe when the US Navy mod gets finished (<http://www.carrierpilots.com>), and the F/A-18F portion is done right, I may reload it, because the high fidelity of LOMAC has always entranced me, and will always remain a supporter. As for my writing? I had hoped to make it longer, a sort of storyline that fleshed out the world that was started more, rather than just the “hero” or “heroine” flying around dropping bombs. The Sacha stories reminded those on the sharp end of the human angle and always the view of what’s supposed to be right, and what’s wrong. For some the line has been drawn, while some can’t draw it no matter how hard they try. Afghanistan isn’t so much like that, but Iraq taught me the same views of “where do you draw the line?” And I tried that with Alexei, a more “pragmatic” outlook on warfare, which in part is me. I myself have to ask those questions, daily as I’ve dealt with supporting a lot of firefights and the unit I am assigned to. I hope to develop some of my skills into story, without of course breaking OPSEC, but either way, it should give some people the idea that writing a story isn’t a popularity contest, and it’s putting your ideas and letting people see what they say. I always enjoyed writing the few stories I wrote anyways, they are a great diversion and it just something to feel proud in. Some things you have to stop and question, while sometimes shooting and asking questions later is the preferred course. I had hoped I did a good enough job with Alexei, without being overdramatic. He is a fun character to write, because his pragmatism is of course is challenged by the reality of real life, and how he deals with it. Sometimes I’m like that, but more often than not it’s just the situation.

Back in the Saddle, unlike *My Brother, My Enemy* is not a requested story, but something I threw up to test the waters again. *My Brother My Enemy* is a great story, as well as of course the other stories that the Sacha Chronicles has sparked. Cat threw it out there, and we gobbled it up. I had hoped to see more from other people who wanted to take the time to flesh out a very interesting world but that’s not for me to do, that’s for others to be inspired by. So by saying all this, I remind the readers that Alexei’s world view is his character’s own. So what his “views” on reality is that, just a fictional rendition on a fictional universe set of course in relation to current events. Naturally the biggest thing was the Georgian Uprising late last year. Unfortunately I did not pay as much interest in the conflict I should have, as really I had other things going on.... It’s a different perspective when you’re deployed and something major breaks out. The threat of nukes is still out there. Not so much when I was a little kid, but nonetheless when you’re in a country that’s tenacious, both in the children of the mujahedeen that

fought the Soviets twenty years ago, and the country itself. Perhaps I'll throw some of that flavor in there, but for now we'll stay in the Black Sea region. I've enjoyed writing, and I hope you enjoy this story.

Needless to say, the events and people are of course not real. The locations, are as real as I can get off of maps, so while locations are real, it is just a story, a work of fiction, nothing more.

Mods used:

- Dave's F-111A Aardvark (<http://forum.combatace.com/index.php?showtopic=36096>)

- Black Sea terrain by Pfunk (modified for the story)

-Wings Over Israel, Oct 08 Patch.

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Nellis Air Force Base, Nevada, 2007

Greetings! I am back in black, so you all say. I am Captain Alexei Karmarov, yes of the 503<sup>rd</sup> Special Air Warfare Regiment. With the T'bilisi Peace Accords still in place, I have moved on. Right now I am at the infamous Nellis Air Force base under the wing of Colonel Martin. I have been assigned here on an "Outreach" program designed to help our two countries air forces enhance themselves. While the US Air Force, and the US Navy really do not need our expertise, we have learned our combat experiences, both mine and Dimitri's, have proved invaluable in exercises. It has been a long time and I have been flying the F-15E Strike Eagle for some time. I fear that Colonel Martin is trying to make me come to the West by flying such a powerful aircraft! The Su-33M2 that was so unforgiving was just replaced by the Strike Eagle. The Strike Eagle is a dedicated aircraft designed from the interceptor. Unlike Russian aircraft, which most have a secondary role to the fighter one, this one is just to drop bombs. I have dropped the JDAM and was suitably impressed. We are working on GPS weapons too, the KAB series the foremost in this.

The KAB-250S is now our newest frontline weapon to feature such system. However, unlike the sleek JDAM, it is still worth the money when you don't want to blow houses up! As far as I am concerned, my life has changed over the years since then. My father passed away a couple years ago, and therefore left a power vacuum as far as my fate. With his loss the program was subject to termination. The experiences that were recorded by me and Dimitri served to improve the Su-30 series, so the flying was worth it. Since the Accords, the aircraft were scrapped and used for regular aircraft, to keep those flying. So the unit is still "alive" but now is more or less... "Nomadic" how you would say. But the good thing is that our new benefactor, General Ivan Puskin rescued us. Yes that same Ivan Puskin that put me in this delicate situation of being a "special operations aviator" that these days, seems like nothing

new. You have your American Special Forces helicopter pilot, and you have the Spetznaz of course, but that is for somebody else to talk about. I and Dimitri have gone to different airbases as exchange pilots, learning new things about the US Air Force. General Puskin has been good friends with Colonel Martin. I have flown the A-10 for a little bit. Only politics would not let me fly in Afghanistan, like my Father has. But then again I have learned so much in the past two years that I have grown accustomed to the US way of life more than the Russian way of life. It does not mean that I will defect to the West, as I still love Mother Russia and always will.

But today it was the weekend, when Colonel Martin asked me to stop by the Operations Room. I had assumed that it was for another briefing, but he arrived in civilian clothes, along with another man in his flight suit, Captain Derek “Jimmy” Eckman. I had shown up in uniform, not knowing. Both looked at me and chuckled.

“Damn I should have told you to come in civilian clothes Emenivich, I just wanted to show you something.” Colonel Martin waved his hand in dismissal. “Well anyways, I wanted to show you an old simulator we still use.” He motioned to a room marked “Top Secret” but I was not concerned, many have spied to get in here, and I am merely walking in. However the signs were somewhat faded, when the Old Russian Bear was still on its “rampage” towards the West.

The room itself wasn’t much I noted as it was filled with a couple simulators. Old compared to the ones used today, which can simulate all movement in most axis of motion. Colonel Martin motioned to the one labeled “A1” and I had opened the door. It was like most simulators, with an F-111 cockpit surrounded by large screens, the access doors opened up for us. Captain Eckman looked at it and whistled. He was an F-15E WSO operator, just recently come from deployment to Afghanistan. I had looked around myself, and saw a table with the controller/observer with a screen and a computer where he sat, along with any observers behind the cockpit. Naturally this was to alleviate the “testing stress” that developed when the rated pilots were reviewed by their superiors. Captain Eckman ran his finger over the simulator.

“I suppose we’ll ‘fly’ this today sir?” He asked quizzically and took it all in. He did a walk around, checking everything. “And I’m Wizzo I assume sir?”

“Yes, Alexei pilots. I know you two have never flown in this simulator but hey, it’s something to kill time on a weekend is it not?” He smiled, he never seemed to relax on weekends, but then again it was boring anyways. “Go ahead and strap in gentleman, I’ll run you through a basic scenario just to see how things go. I’ve always piloted this myself, my father did strike missions in Vietnam so he’s quite the expert that I’m not when it comes to this aircraft.”

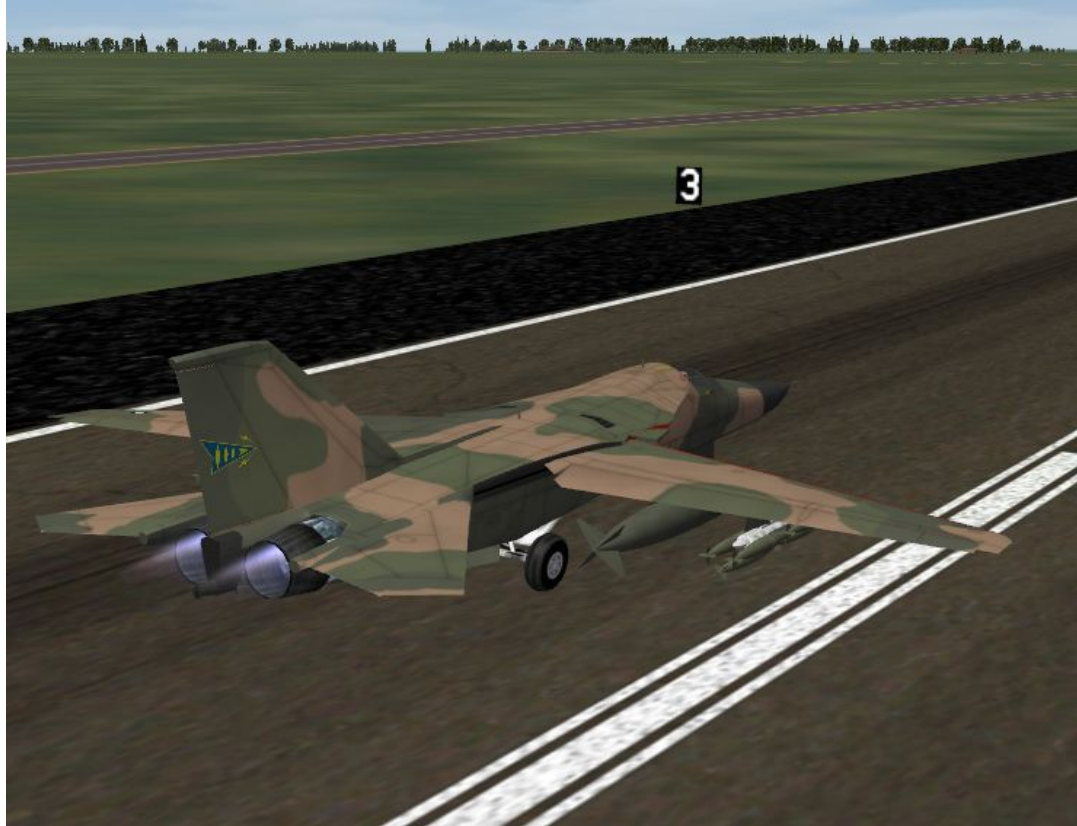
Both I and Captain Eckman nodded, and we sat in our respective spots. Unlike our Su-24, the F-111 was of course built before, and we copied the design to better our strike forces in the old Soviet Union. The Su-24 was slightly leaner but that was okay, the F-111 was nothing but ugly, earning its name of "Aardvark" due to its nose design. I was not sure if it was intentional, but that was okay as I crawled in the cockpit. It was slightly cramped, but then again when you are tall most are! I set myself while Captain Eckman adjusted himself, adjusting my straps as well.

"Gentleman due to the previous conflict you will be attacking a Forward Arming and Refueling Point, located in Turkey, designated FARP Wrigley. The waypoints and other data is loaded already, it's a scenario we run to see how well some pilots do and to get a reconnaissance of the area for pilots and WSOs like Captain Eckman, just in case. We keep it updated just for fun, and has proven itself quite useful. Threats will be typical Russian hardware, we haven't gotten around to adding the HAWK yet, but that is okay, sometimes the Russian hardware is nasty enough. Once you are ready, take a few minutes to familiarize yourself with the controls. I will start the scenario in ten minutes." He looked at us thoughtfully. "For your weapons load you will be carrying twelve Mark eighty-two 'slicks' and two fuel tanks, along with an ALQ-101 jammer. Any questions?"

"No sir, just trying to find the bomb release switch." Captain Eckman asked with a smile. He continued to fiddle with the controls, trying to figure out what was what. Compared to what he was used to in the Strike Eagle, this was back in the Stone Age. I too did the same, figuring out most controls. It was fairly basic, no real MFDs or electronic displays save for the HUD. The HUD itself was fairly basic, with a circled crosshair in the middle of the screen. Selecting the ground ordnance, the crosshair dropped. I had hoped more information would be there, but no, it was fairly simple. It was built in a time when the old analog dials were still en vogue, and technology had not advanced as quickly as the rest. Colonel Martin gave us a warning, and we were on the runway, ready for takeoff.

"Go ahead and start Alexei, no need for radio procedures, I will be able to watch everything here."

"Yes sir." I had found the throttle, and disengaged the wheel brakes. I pushed the throttle forward to full afterburner. My standard practice is to never use afterburner due to the high fuel consumption. You must account for this with long range strikes. The aircraft moved slowly, the Su-33M2 moved faster at rest than this plane!



I had noticed that the aircraft drifted and tried to correct with the rudder, but no luck, as it built up speed finally. At 160 knots I pulled on the stick and the nose rose as we took off. Once we were off the ground, I had retracted the gear and turned towards our first waypoint. I had let the aircraft stay in near level flight in order to build up speed, and throttled back to military power. If you are to be doing low level strikes in any aircraft, it is recommended to stay at this setting so you can manage other tasks while flying in this convoluted environment.





About five minutes into the “flight”, I had noticed something was wrong, Colonel Martin came over the intercom.

“Alexei, check your flaps.”

I had looked at the indicator... where was it? Oh there it was! I had raised the flaps. The nose started to dip down and I corrected it and more speed came out of the aircraft. I had smiled in the oxygen mask and Captain Eckman chuckled. Well it is not every day you fly an old American plane. I had similar problems with the Su-33 and Mig-29 when I too started flying! I was bored. I looked at Captain Eckman.

“This is boring, want to go lower?” My hand started to gently push down anyways. Captain Eckman merely nodded. Comrades, it does require more pressure to fly this aircraft. Even the Su-33 did not require much pressure in order to work!



The aircraft obediently nosed down gently, and then we were skimming the treetops. SE Russia is flat until you reach the mountains, but still was a nice view.



“Much better.” Captain Eckman said quietly. There was not much talk because there was not much to talk about during our mission. Besides I had not worked with him prior so I did not know him. There were no threats to be concerned about at this time, so we enjoyed the beautiful Caucasus region as we flew past it. I only spoke when needed and that was not much when you fly by yourself. Even while training I did not speak unless I needed to. It gave the impression that I was stoic, for a Russian, but that is okay, I accept what they think and do not care. And we pushed more south, reaching the Caucasus.





As you can see, even for such a large aircraft, the F-111A can handle itself quite well. I was amazed at how I never breathed hard yet but then again with such an old aircraft, you must take it easy or you will crash the aircraft. However I reminded myself that this was only a training scenario, not the real aircraft. But it was manageable so I did not care too much. We were crossing Georgia and not much happened, as the country was still considered friendly at the time, even for the scenario, despite recent events to the contrary.





The route itself was uninteresting, as we continued along the route, the only real “threat” was around the Armenian/Turkish border, in which I will relate. We were flying to the Initial Point when our RWR started beeping that we were being locked by a SAM. Since I was already flying low, I had decided to activate the jammer by flipping both switches. Yes comrades, I am aware I have only one loaded on the fuselage station.





“Radar 2 o’clock.” Captain Eckman called out. I had wondered what the use of a WSO was in this aircraft. I had managed all this by myself, and when I was still flying the Su-33M2, much more than now!

“Type?” I had thought of the Shilka, which I was sure was out there.

“Squat Eye, its strobing us quite a bit, just waiting for a lock.” He said somewhat excitedly, I too had adrenaline coursing through my veins, and the aircraft “appeared” to speed up. “Now moving to our 3 o’clock. I have another radar in search mode. I figure we’re being locked up by the SAM, and that’s probably a Shilka out there. Jammer on?”

“Da, it is on.” I double-checked and it was on, but yet the S-125 Neva/Pechora, or SA-3 “Goa” as you call it, was still locked on! I guess American ECM equipment was not as good as they claim! So I had decided to revisit the treetops again in order to break its lock. It is fairly simple when you have the terrain to break the lock. We continued south along the treetops. I do not think you can crash into the trees, I am assuming the calculations required would even break down the computer chips and make it unusable. However the graphics were good, very impressive compared to some flight simulator pictures I have seen.



Thankfully the alarm had gone silent! We continued south and evaded the SAM. It was nothing serious, the HAWK at Ochamchira was more of a threat than this computer one! We continued south, the Armenian area not setup for threats. Then we hit the Initial Point and began our attack run to the west.





I had watched the Horizontal Situation Indicator as much as possible while I looked closely through the window, leaning forward in order to better see.



After this comrades, things became kind of blurry, so I will recount what I remember. We had watched the HSI needle point towards the target, but I chose to come in more from the North East, considering my attack run would be straight in. Had I been equipped with smart weapons, the attack run would have gone more different. We came around the hill and saw our target area, an open field. I had slowed down to make the run and aim as best as possible but I had overcorrected and not lined up properly! We screamed past, with tracers from the M163 Vulcan's that were there shooting at us! I had felt the aircraft shudder as the 20mm rounds punctured the aircraft. I applied afterburner, and dodged behind a hill in order to shake off our pursuers. Sweat was building now as I thought quickly. Consulting the HSI again, I had to head NE in order to line up properly. The release mechanism was set to ripple off six bombs for our quick drop and escape, with six remaining for a reattack, which I hope was not needed. We crested the hill and things were okay, we must have confused the computerized gunners and I had lined up with the field. I had released the bombs when the aircraft began to corkscrew through the air! We had been hit! I tried to level the aircraft but the damage was too great! I heard the bombs go off, and then heard the impacts of the combined fire from the AAA situated there.



At that time the screens went black, the simulation ended. I had shaken my head to bring me back to reality. It was a humbling experience I tell you after survived so much in this area! I had never flown here but as you see, it did not matter. I consoled myself that this was a simulation, not reality. However it would have looked bad had I been reviewed. However I would not use this aircraft unless it was equipped with smart munitions. Captain Eckman

nodded to me, and unbuckled himself and took off the helmet. I did likewise, enjoying the lack of pressure on me.

“If I had been in the Mud Hen, we would have been on target, used a JDAM and be done with it. I’m glad I wasn’t born during that time, or had to fly this ancient piece of gear.” He shrugged and leaned back in the seat, sighing to himself. “But this has been a good experience, I do have respect for those who really used this aircraft though.” He rapped the cockpit frame. “Heh, knock on wood I would say.”

“Da, I agree, had I been in my Su-33M2 I would have done the strike much easier and much faster, this plane was good for its time.” It also made me look at how we are today, and the skill of so many aviators during the Vietnam War, where they did not have the electronics, or weapons to make it so easy to do. But after I had stepped out I had realized I had given this plane such a bad opinion after one mission, I thought about this as I left the simulator, and stepped down to the floor. I then walked to Colonel Martin, where Captain Eckman was also walking to. Colonel Martin didn’t look too happy, but then again I felt he was not out to yell at us.

“Well gentleman, I see you both could have done better. However this is your first time in such an aircraft, so I won’t get too critical. Alexei, your approach, conservative, I have reviewed the gun tapes from the Caucasus and you seemed at the time... more aggressive. Then again you knew the area, I would think it wouldn’t matter, but then again, you were flying in an unfamiliar aircraft. Same thing with you Derek, you really didn’t participate. The computer.” He jerked his thumb back towards the desk. “Records all inputs from each participant so the evaluator knows what needs to be improved on. I can say if I threw you in a Strike Eagle, or simulator you know what to do. The whole intent sometimes of this simulator is to sometimes throw ‘new technology’ pilots into the mix of here and see how they do.” He took a breath, and sighed as he looked at them. “So Alexei, you obviously know your job as a pilot, and you Derek... are accustomed to your role of not directing the pilot, but did your job well informing the pilot of threats, especially that SA-3. So go back to your hotel Alexei, study up on the Aardvark as much as you can, since we still cannot release information to the public, even though it’s not in much use anymore. Derek the same for you, as next time I’ll add air threats and see really how you both react. Dismissed you two, great job.” He nodded and waited until they were both led out of the building. Colonel Martin shrugged and watched them drive off.

“So you can trust him?” The new voice emanated behind his ear.

“Alexei? Yeah I can, that man has saved some of our guys in the Caucasus more than once. He’s a nationalist, but a practical, pragmatic one. He wouldn’t betray his country, and I think his loyalty extends to at least me. I’m not sure about others though, he’s very picky.”

“That’s okay, his skill with the Aardvark showed me enough to include the gun tapes from the war. Impressive skills, think we can use him for some time? Maybe we put him in one of our squadrons and see how he handles our new Hornet.”

“That’s fine, I’ll supply clearances and other stuff to help your staff ease him in. He usually works with a fat bastard named Colonel Grachev. Haven’t really felt him out, quiet guy but there is a mind up there. He’s slippery but if you put enough muscle on him, he’ll fold. Alexei... you gotta just not screw him over, or he’ll do some damage. He’s tough, but he’ll work with me, as long as you let me, Admiral.”

“Can’t say the CNO follows your wishes, but you know me Jack, I’ll see what I can do.”

“No problem Admiral.”

Perhaps I should take more time and learn such an aircraft, it seemed just right, power, but the lack of precision guided weapons capability hampered that version, at least in my opinion. I had gotten on Google and found out that there was, the F-111F. Perhaps I can revisit this scenario some other time, but now I must relax, and await more training.

Questions? Comments?

Email me at [flanker56@hotmail.com](mailto:flanker56@hotmail.com), or contact EricJ at <http://www.combatace.com>

Myspace: <http://www.myspace.com/flanker562>

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