

## Feature

# Sacha's Grandmother Visits

## An IL-2: Forgotten Battles - Aces Mission Story

by **Cat**

One must always be careful for the unexpected in our business, no? Today, I was so reminded.

It was my turn for "the duty," and you know what that means all too well. Yes, today I am what you Westerners call the "CQ," the charge-of-quarters. The Regimental staff duty officer. A most imposing person indeed, the staff duty officer. I once knew an army officer who said that one automatically assumes a more dignified air, straightening up one's otherwise sloppy attire upon visualizing so august a personage!

Or perhaps not.

I am in... I have not the words. Ah, the "doghouse?" I am out of favour with the Commander today. The last mission, to the nuclear plant at Samelelio, was a great success, despite the suicide... I can call it nothing else... of the Georgian Su-25 section tasked with us for the mission. The Georgians' sacrifice put the Commander in a foul mood indeed, not in the least tempered by our success. And imagine my chagrin when the Commander found out that the flight surgeon had not yet totally cleared me for combat flying after my mishap at Suhumi some weeks ago. He had cleared me to fly once again. And when I was asked this at the briefing for the Samelelio strike, I told the truth indeed. However, what I did not say was that I was not yet cleared for *combat missions*... and thus I am temporarily... the term is "grounded," is it not? He was not pleased. I am too eager to fight, and thus I am punished by having my wings clipped for a time. The Americans' A-10 squadron leader, Colonel Martin, is acting as our composite Regimental executive officer. And he conveyed to me the Commander's displeasure. Colonel Martin calls it being "benched." This is a term from the American football game, yes? Until the surgeon is satisfied, and the report of such is actually in the Commander's hands this time, I am "riding the pine," as my American friends say... and even then I may find myself the duty officer for a time still, until the Commander is satisfied that I have learned this lesson well.

***"...what I did not say  
was that  
I was not yet cleared  
for combat missions..."***

But I did not let this setback dampen my spirits. I passed the time in rounds of our base at Sochi, helping Vasily, visiting Kolya the meteorologist, and visiting the Americans as well. I have watched also the comings and goings of our sister unit, the 503rd, in their strangely coloured Su-33s. I even had lunch with one of them, Lt. Karmarov. He is known as a very skillful pilot. A little arrogant, perhaps, but we Russians are sometimes given to that when we are good and we know it. He is the man Vasily confronted in the dining facility before our raid on Suhumi, where I was shot down. After lunch with Alexei, I had a surprise! I returned to the operations area, and was told I had a visitor.

A personal visitor? *Here?*

In the dayroom, a woman sat reading, her back to me. Tall, straight-shouldered, wearing a black wool turtleneck sweater

and her silver hair carefully piled atop her head... a familiar bearing. But I knew this woman!

"Grandmama?" I could not believe my eyes!

She turned, smiling, a twinkle in one clear, green eye. *"Shoura, my angel. Come, give me a hug!"*

Grandmama is still strong and vital, even for a woman of her age. She is nearing eighty, I think, but one would never know it. She looks twenty years younger, or more, easily. She rose and clasped me in a strong embrace.

***"You are Dmitri's child,  
after all. And as  
stubborn as my son  
ever was."***

*"I came as soon as I knew, Shoura. You did not tell Dmitri that you were hurt when the terrorists shot your MiG down! You minimize too much. I knew more was to be told."*

*"How did you..."*

She raised one hand, cutting me off. *"I may be old, but not stupid. You are Dmitri's child, after all. And as stubborn as my son ever was. I can read between the lines of your letters. And the young man who flies on your wing, Vasily, also wrote us when you were lost, and again when you were found. So, I came to see for myself how you were, with your Commander's permission."*

*"You have spoken to the Commander?"* I was horrified at that! Grandmama presumed greatly to contact him!

*"Indeed. Remember, Shoura, I too flew in the 586th once. As an alumna, I have certain privileges."*

She smiled, a little smugly, I think, and grew quiet.



Shoura would never tell us if she were really hurt. Such an angel, she has always been. She does not wish to worry her family with tales of trouble. But I know better. And I have seen the face of war in the air. I see the elastic wrap on her arm. She was hurt, fortunately, only slightly. But she is as impetuous as I was, sixty years ago. Her Commander is right to temper her, for Alexandra Dmitrievna Andreeva, my granddaughter, is one who will burn her candle at both ends and willingly too. As I did — when I fought the Germans for the Rodina, so long ago.

She is not the first Sasha in our family, have I told you? Though she spells it differently, "Sacha" with a "c" instead of "s," the young girls today want to differentiate themselves from the rest, don't they? She was named for her grandmother, me. I too am Alexandra, though my father's name was Petr. So I am Alexandra Petrovna. And my friends also call me Sasha. My granddaughter is also not the first of our family to fly with her Regiment, either. That honour fell to me, in the Great Patriotic War. I am so proud of her. It is not every woman whose granddaughter follows in her own footsteps!

I have had the privilege of knowing many heroes of our glorious, dead Soviet Union. I flew with Katya Budanova, and sweet Lilya, that the soldiers called the "White Rose." Marina Raskova herself brought me to the unit, when I only was a crop-duster over the kolkhozes in the central Ukraine. In the Soviet Union, women were expected to be equal citizens, the

burdens fell upon us all. I was proud to be a Party member. And I grieve for its passing, though it was time, for the USSR had become fat and corrupt.

***"I have had the privilege  
of knowing many heroes  
of our glorious,  
dead Soviet Union."***

And I have flown many of its fighter aircraft, and those of Western nations. I will tell you of my very favorite of them all, and you may be surprised. Most are, who find out.

In 1943, the agency you called "Lend Lease" was in full swing. This would bring the incomparable Pokryshkin his Airacobra, itself a plane with few equals. And it was then that I was detailed for a time to the Moscow PVO. You know, of course, that Russia has two air forces.

The air-defense air force, called PVO, and the military air force, called VVS. Shoura's Regiment came to this Georgian hell-hole from the Moscow PVO, detailed to the VVS, which is why they traded their interceptors for the MiG frontline fighters. And in 1943, the Moscow PVO was receiving a new interceptor. The British "Spitfire," Mark V. This marvelous interceptor had served with distinction in the air war over Britain. And I was one of those selected to meet the British in Iraq, at Basra, and take delivery of Spitfires for our air force. Four of them came with us, in secret, to our base in the East. We would try them in combat, under field conditions. By now, all of us had left our parent unit, the beloved 586th, and Marina our leader was also dead — killed in action. I was detailed to the Moscow PVO, as my granddaughter would be. But now, I and Galina my wing, and another section of the new Spitfire fighters, would join the 296th Regiment for a combat tour over the besieged City.



This day, four of us would perform the combat air patrol. Galina and I would fly our wonderful new Spitfires, 1 White and 2 White. We would be escorted by Yakovlev fighters of the 296th IAP. The first, in 23 White, was Lidiia Vladimirovna, the "White Rose" herself, only months before her death. She would save all our lives this day. Tamara Kazarinova took her wing in 6 Red. We flew west, toward the setting sun, toward the Germans. We intended merely to exercise the Spitfires,

we wanted to see what the British saw in them. Our formation was loose, combat spread, though Galina held close to me. I heard the call come from Tamara, over the radio, aircraft close. Twelve o'clock, straight ahead. I squinted into the sun, we should have been smarter.

*"I see them, lead!"*

*"Second section, separate to the south pair. Tamara and I will take the north pair."*

*"Three."*

*"Four."*

Lilya bore in on the advancing Germans. They flew the hated Bf-109. She sighted in on the wingman, and they played a deadly game of what the Americans call "chicken." But Lilya was faster, and the German erupted into flames as they passed.



I heard her call the victory on the radio, as the German section Galina and I were after swept over my head and I raked the Spitfire into a hard right bank to follow.

The German leader, in a grey-painted 109 with a big red heart on it, bore in on Tamara. We heard her cry out, her Yak-1 was hit, not mortally, but badly enough, with a fuel leak beginning. Lilya frantically pulled the nose of her Yak onto the German pilot.



The German was crafty, he wanted to bag a Yak for his trophy wall. He planned to use the "boom and zoom," the Luftwaffe's favorite tactic. For this, their despised Bf-109 is unparalleled. He set up again for the joust with Tamara, but he was in for a surprise. He bore in on her, Tamara's damaged Yak virtually immobile. We heard her calling out his position, as we jockeyed to get our sights on our own targets. We were keeping these two 109s out of the fight!

*"Steady, Tamara. I'm coming!"* It was Lilya!

The German was fixed on his target, he did not see Lilya sweeping in behind him as he steadied up on Tamara's crippled Yak. As he closed, suddenly 20mm and 12.7mm tracers from behind! Lilya was closing in, firing her Yak's two guns!



Frantically, the German corrected his travel-path, yanking into a hard right bank, trying to get out of Lilya's sights as Tamara screamed by him. Lilya's tracers played over the German's wings as he maneuvered back to the left.



Suddenly, as he dove for safety, a critical hit! Parts flying off the 109, its pilot was forced to parachute to safety.



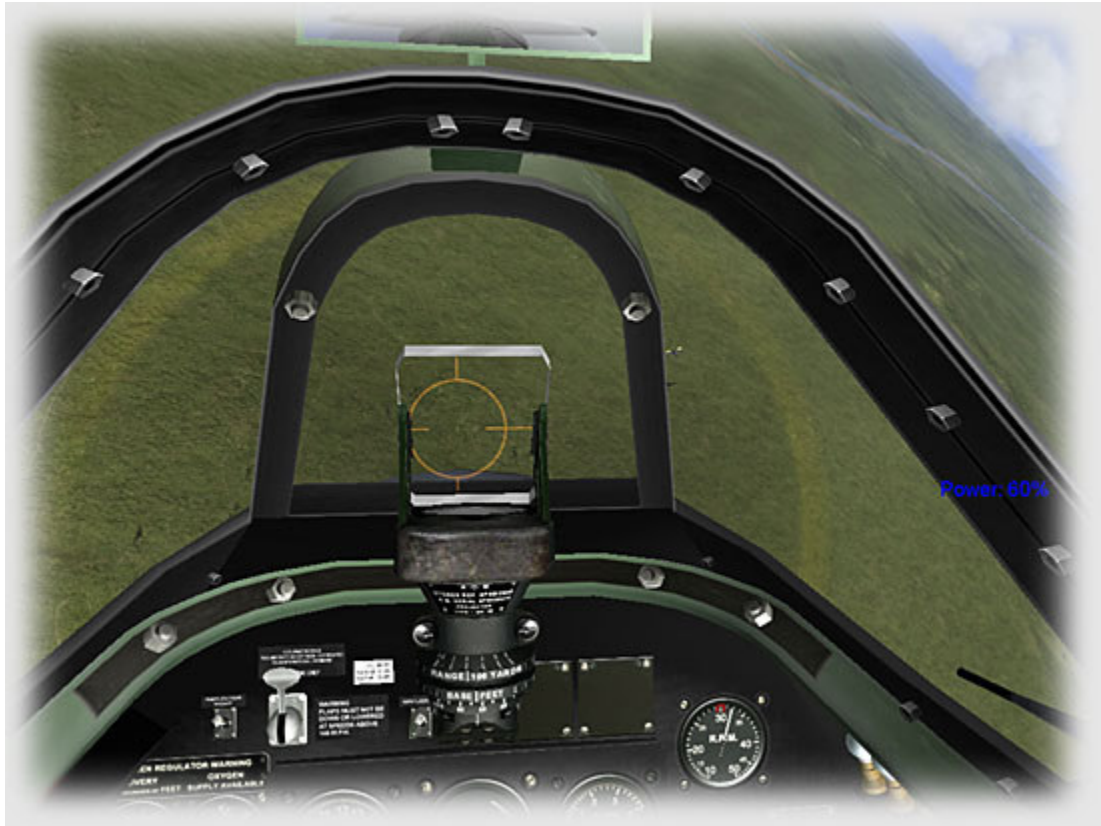
Galina and I were having a tough time of it ourselves.

Galina Ivanovna was a marvelous pilot, who could wring every last drop from the Spitfire's thundering Merlin engine. She hung behind me tenaciously, holding off the German flight leader as I worked at killing his wingman. The British aircraft was amazing in its dexterity! Nothing turns as tightly, flies as smoothly, incomparable! Its two 20mm Hispano cannon and four .303 machine guns spat tracer at the frantically evading Bf-109.



The German had taken the fight vertical, into his preferred envelope, and my beloved Spitfire responded admirably. This,

air-to-air interception, is where it excels. As the German dove past me, I snapped my 1 White into a smart wingover to follow.



He could not evade me. I used the excellent British reflector ring-sight, the Type I Mk III, to box him in. I played cannon shells from my twin Hispano 20mms across his fuselage.



Mortally wounded, the 109 slowed and began to fall off to the left.





He crossed under my nose and I saw the German bail out!



*"Sasha, look out! A 109 at your six, high!"*

The German had slipped past Galina's guard. She went vertical, diving right past his nose, trying to shake him off me, without success.



*"Two, go low and stay out of the fight. Three, work him north, if you can."*

Lilya, wanting to set a trap for the German. I would lead him to her, as she and Galina together sprang it. Again, 20mm and 12.7mm tracer spray past a 109.



This German breaks off his pursuit of me, to deal with the new threat. I fix Tamara's Yak by its trail of fuel, to ensure she is clear of any enemy pursuit, then turn to cover Galina and Lilya. The three of us will dog this German.



Sparks fly as Lilya connects again, on her third 109 of the day! But she is too close, the German breaks free.

But Galina Ivanovna has saddled up now and her Spitfire's weapons rage, pouring red tracer at the enemy aircraft.

He is still trying to get at Lilya or me, and we lead him in a crazy loop, in his vertical element now, but the unequalled Spitfire, its Merlin roaring as I dive for the ground, keeps the distance.

And he cannot hold off all three of us for long.



*"Galina! Finish him!"*

*"I'm trying, Sasha! Damn it! ...I've lost him!"*

*"I see him, four, give me one second — careful, Sasha!"*

As I pull out, Lilya and I flash past one another!



The wily German has nearly whittled in half the odds against him with his cunning flying! But his time is drawing to a close. We settle in behind him for this pass, Galina, Lilya, and then me.

But Galina overshoots, and Lilya must maneuver out of the way...



...leaving me closing with the German as he scissors frantically!



He's trying to reverse on me, I've only got one chance! He shows a full plan view in the Mk III sight, and I fire as he flashes past my nose. An explosion as 20mm fire connects behind his cockpit, and then he's gone.

*"I got him! Blast, it wasn't enough!"*



*"I'm on him, three-hold your course! Ha! Take that!"*

I look out my right canopy, to see the 109 slightly above and ahead shattering into a mess of debris as Lilya poured 20mm fire into its right wing...



...then banked and shot past my tail from the right to left.



It was her third victory of the day, though she only got credit for a one-third kill, for Galina and I also got part credit for it. Lilya was an amazing pilot.

*"Good shooting, Lilya!"*

We formed up to shepherd Tamara home.



*"Grandmama?"*

*"Yes? Oh, child... I'm sorry. I was off in another world."*

Another time.

I pray that our children will not have to see what we have seen, and I fear that Shoura and her friends have already seen too much.

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Learn more about the Soviet aviatrix **Lidiia Vladimirovna Litvyak** <http://www.ctie.monash.edu.au/hargrave/litviak.html>.

Learn more about the Soviet aviatrix **Marina Raskova**  
[http://www.ctie.monash.edu.au/hargrave/soviet\\_women\\_pilots.html](http://www.ctie.monash.edu.au/hargrave/soviet_women_pilots.html).

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## To recreate the mission

Go to the Quick Mission Builder and set-it-up.

**Your Flight:**



- Two Spit Mk V-b, skill level Average
- Wing element #1: Yak-1b skill level Ace, use Lilya Litvyak "White 23" skin
- Wing element #2: Yak-1b skill level Veteran

### **Germans:**

- First flight: Two Bf-109G-2, skill level Average
- Second flight: Two Bf-109G-6 (no tank, no wing guns, 20mm center cannon) skill level Ace

### **Environment:**

- Map: Smolensk
  - Time: Noon
  - Altitude: 3000
  - Weather: Good
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### **System Specs**

- AMD Athlon 3000+ processor
  - MachSpeed N2PAP-Lite motherboard with onboard Aureal AC97 sound
  - PNY Technologies Verto NVIDIA GeForce 4 Ti 4600 video card with 128MB DDR
  - 1GB Kingston PC2700 DDR DRAM
  - Creative 12x CD-ROM
  - Maxtor 40GB main drive
  - DirectX Version 9.0a
  - Windows 2000 with SP4
  - Thrustmaster Fox2 Pro USB joystick
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