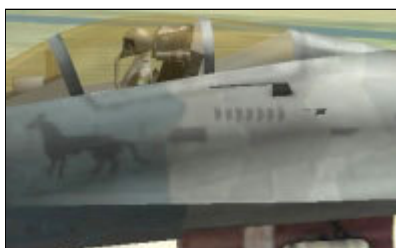


Feature

Kiss Me, Kislovodsk

by Guest Writer **Eric "Flanker56" Johnson**

Well comrades, the region has, how you say, "heated up?" Da, it has within the past week. I have been engaged in three missions, and have engaged enemy fighters, only F-4Es. I have had Sgt. Gennedy (you will realize that is not his last name comrades, his first name is always in my mind, forgive me if it bothers you) paint three aircraft symbols on the right side. I have also painted bomb markings on the left side of the aircraft, with each "bomb" worth five targets. I do not like to put multiple bomb markings, and each bomb marking has a "5" to denote how many targets I have destroyed. I have a total of 37 targets destroyed, so when I make my next five, I can put up another bomb marking. But what was important was my father had came to Sochi-Adler to see me. I was totally unprepared for this!

A screenshot of a software interface titled "Pilot Log Book". The interface is divided into several sections: a filter table, log filters, and pilot information. The filter table shows a list of target types with their quantities and status. The log filters section contains dropdown menus for various mission parameters. The pilot information section includes a pilot's name, country, and rank, along with a pilot portrait and squadron logo.

FILTER	QTY	TARGET TYPE	STATUS
	3	ALL	ALL TARG TYPES
	0	ALL	ALL FILTERS
	0	F-4E	DESTROYED
	0	ALL	DAMAGED
	37	ALL	DEST/DAMAGED
	0	ALL	GENERAL
	0	ALL	LOG FILTERS
	0	ALL	
	0	ALL	

LOG FILTERS: DATE: ALL, MISSN: ALL, TASK: ALL, TAKEOFF: ALL, AIRFLD: ALL, RESULT: ALL

PILOT: NAME: Aleksei Karmarov, COUNTRY: Russia, RANK: POST

I was working on my aircraft when I heard a UAZ pull up. I had assumed it was Major Grachev, but it turned out to be my father. He strode up as I was checking with Sgt. Gennedy the landing gear strut. We had thought it got damaged a day ago on a bridge strike mission. A sharp IRLF gunner fired his missile too early. I managed to evade, but the fragments had hit my aircraft. However, I did not feel any loss of control, so I did not think of it. However, there was a scratch on the wheel cover, so I felt we had to inspect it. Thankfully it did not damage anything, and became another scratch on the aircraft. However, I am sure you have become curious on the aircraft combat symbols. I have only put them on, I do not put bomb markings like the Americans or British do. I destroy too many targets to paint on my aircraft, for the missions have become easy. With fighter presence it has only gotten a little harder. A slight challenge yes, but not too bad. I engaged one over Tkvarcheli, and the others Northeast of there. We are whittling them down one by one. We have not seen the F-14s that the IRLF is sure to maintain in it's inventory, perhaps saving them for home defense. Most Russian pilots, to include me have not faced this aircraft. We are aware of course of it's capabilities, but it is still unknown to us.

For some pilots, that is okay, but I would like to go up against an F-14, to see if I am properly trained. Nor have we seen any more Mirage 2000-5s, for Sacha in her MiG-29 defeated two! That was the mission where I struck the two bridges and HAWK as a "diversion" . I do not think it was a diversion, at least in my mind. But I am drifting. The presence of my father has somewhat made me happy, for I had not seen him since leaving Moscow for here. We were almost finished when Sgt. Gennedy looked up, and nodded towards my father. I looked as well, and left my work, and walked in my dirty work coveralls and strode to him. My father smiled, and I nodded, I was too tired, and found a rag, and cleaned my hand as best as possible, then shook his hand. Sgt. Gennedy simply nodded, and said he will come back when I am finished.

"Pavel Ivanovich, you look well."

Only father calls me that. Why I do not know, but I do not really care either.

"Thank you father, and you look healthy."

"Do I? I think you have been flying too much."

He let out a small chuckle. Fact is that he is getting old, and not very well either. He motioned towards a couple chairs.

"Come sit Pavel, tell me what of your experiences."

"Well father, we continuously strike at the mujahid, but they persist."

"Da, I know what you mean, I experienced this against the mujhadeen son, they are tenacious, these Arabs. I flew many missions in the Gratch to know they do not love us."

I merely nodded. *"The aircraft is doing very well too."*

He nodded too. *"Yes, that is one reason I had stopped here. I came to inquire about the other one, what is the problem again?"*

Must be jet lag.

"Dimitri's aircraft right engine is non-functional. It merely needs to be replaced."

My father was also about business, and he was also the "project manager" of the 503rd as well. He would do the family matters later on. When you are around business, that is what he talked about. When you were at home, he talked about family business. I am only too used to this.

"I see, and your aircraft, it has been busy I see."

He looked over the aircraft. It was never clean, and only the wheel wells were spotless. They must be, or you cannot tell if they are leaking fluids. That is necessary, or you will not land properly, and that means your aircraft too is non-functional. With the scant resources of the VVS, even the 503rd must maintain it's aircraft to peak performance. Unlike the United States, which has it's own budget for "secret" fighters, we scrape and borrow as we go along. Hence me painting missiles to subdue them. Paint is cheap, but the weapons were not. The funding only extended to two Su-33s, and the capability to give them some precision guided missile capability. In effect, we were field testing these aircraft. The software modification is not hard, nor is the mounting of weapons. However, you must also modify the avionics, so it is not cheap in the long run. But we have proven to the brass that they are efficient in the right hands. Major Grachev also evaluates the capabilities, he is the "manager" of us. Other than that, we do not report to anybody, even Commander Arbatov does not directly control us. We merely find missions to perform, or accept missions that do need to be taken care of. That is how we operate, and do not complain. I surely did not enjoy my time in the 115th Guards Regiment!

"So, do you like the Su-33M2 Pavel?"

He eyed the aircraft some more, merely looking at it.

"Yes father, it is a very capable aircraft."

I was very proud of this aircraft, I have poured every ounce of sweat into it. I would not look at another fighter again. Well, that is not to say I do not find other aircraft beautiful, but this one, is how you say, "hot". I heard my father grunt in agreement, or maybe the slight humidity was getting to him. He never was too happy with heat. I guess from his Afghanistan days.

"Father, do you still smoke?"

I did need a break though, and this was a perfect opportunity, besides, even I get tired of this aircraft. Working on it yes, flying it no.

"Da, we shall go and smoke one then."

My father lifted himself off of the chair, with my assistance, and we walked outside. There was a slight breeze out, which was refreshing to my body. I pulled out my pack of cigarettes, beat up from the work, but I saw they were not broken. I offered one to my father, who took one. Doubtless he had his own, but generosity, even from your own son, cannot be turned down. Besides, we smoke the same kind. We both stood there for a few minutes, in silence, watching the activity on the flightline, smoking our lives away. We watched as a pair of F-15Cs lined up, then took off for yet another combat air patrol along the border.



Every once in awhile an IRLF F-4E attempts to ambush a flight. They usually fly at low level and wait like Piranhas. Intel thinks they are doing that because of my actions. I have dealt some large blows, and the prize of me getting shot down would nonetheless bolster their campaign. Perhaps I have a price on my head? However, we have an A-50 and E-3A on near constant patrol, based in Russia. So they have no way of sneaking up on us, combined with regular combat air patrols. I have encountered one of these, on a mission south of Teberda. I was attacking a suspected munitions dump. As I entered the valley heading south, Overlord called a distance of only 10 kilometers. I fly with my radar off, and I got lucky his tail was pointed towards me. It took one AMRAAM to bring him down. He had no room to maneuver. It flew true into his tail, severing the rear fuselage, and the pilots had no time to eject. Luckily it crashed into a river, and not killed any civilians!

"Pavel?" My father had finished his cigarette, and I was staring at an empty apron. I shook myself.

"I am fine father, I was recounting an engagement."

"I see, your eyes show it. Come, it is time we go to your room. I trust you maintain your bottle of vodka as well as your aircraft?"

Like father, like son, it is a matter of Russian pride to drink vodka. It stings, but it is an acquired taste. I nodded in agreement.

"Da father, we can go."

I let security know I was leaving, and we walked together to the UAZ, my father climbing in the passenger seat. Leave it to him. Then again, I am not only his son, but also a junior officer. Generals do not drive Lieutenants around. I bit my annoyance, and climbed in the drivers seat, started the vehicle up, then drove to the barracks building. I parked it near a US Air Force Humvee. The Humvee, while better looking, still was a "bare necessities" vehicle like the UAZ. It must be, since you have to manufacture so many, and allows one user to instantly be acquainted with the vehicle no matter where it is. I got out instantly, and walked to the other side and opened the door for my father. While they may not drive for lower ranking personnel, it is not above them to get out on their own. My father is old, so I must be an officer and a son at the same time. Though I think Sgt. Gennedy is rubbing off on me, I am becoming more like the enlisted. Which comrades, is not a bad thing. I have seen many pilots have "mechanical failures" because of improper attitudes towards their support crews. You are just the user, they are the maintainers. If you treat them like dirt, they will hold you in contempt, and perhaps a "mechanical failure" will become fatal, intended or otherwise. You treat them like men, but still be firm, then they will lift an engine by

themselves, rather than use lifting equipment. I escorted my father proudly into the barracks. I do not talk too much to the other people, especially when dealing with personal matters. I do not let the fact my father is a General determine my career. Yes, I do use it to my advantage when necessary, but no more than that. Then I will be less respected by my peers. True, if they do not like you, then so be it, but only a small percentage, not everyone.

I guided my father to my room, oblivious to the various reactions of a General with me. I laughed inside at what their thoughts may be. Let them wonder some more, they probably wonder about me alot anyway. I took off the coveralls, excused myself, and took a shower. It is rude to have a guest and not be clean, or at least smelling normal. Besides, it makes you feel better nyet? I finished, and put on some civilian clothes. My father was standing in the main room, looking at the photographs I had managed to acquire. Some were of the airbase, and some where gun camera footage. The air to air engagement described above was one of them, when the AMRAAM struck the rear of the tail, that exact moment. I only wish some of these photographs I could openly show, but I was authorized to have them at least in the barracks room. Not many visit so it is no problem. My father has more than likely seen the gun camera footage anyway. It does not matter, he has the authorization, even President Putin has probably seen them, or somebody in Moscow has. We sat down, and started on the bottle. Then came the question I had hoped he would not ask, but knew he would anyway. He is my father no?

"So Pavel, enough about the military, how many women have you seen out here?"

"Only a few father."

I tried to dodge this one as long as possible, but vodka also loosens your mouth.

"Only a few! Pavel! What have you been waiting for! Tell me, have you decided to marry yet?"

"Nyet father, I have not found the right woman. I am at war, not back in Zhukovsky."

"Yeah yeah, I was in Afghanistan, and met this woman, and she is your mother. We were at the same airbase. I did always not have war on my mind son."

He smiled devilishly. He did have a point. But I did not worry about relationships too much. But this Sacha kept sticking in my head. Then he must have read my mind.

"What about this Sacha? You have talked to her yes?"

Damn!

"Da father, only had lunch once, but we are too busy to start a relationship, and we exactly do not find the time either. Neither of us are not in love father."

This part was true. The life of a fighter pilot in war was personal life, missions, maintenance, planning. Priority was not in any particular order. At least he nodded in agreement to that, along with a grunt. He himself was a combat pilot, so he would understand that.

"Well son, she certainly looks attractive, much like your mother when she was young."

My father sobered up. The issue of my mother was a sad one. She was killed in a car accident in St. Petersburg while on vacation. Which is why my father's health wasn't too good. He was there. Poor mother, her first and last trip to that grand city. We both sat in silence for a long time, each of us sipping on our vodka, relishing or recounting various thoughts or memories. Then my father broke the silence by standing up. I looked at him, expecting something. He looked at me knowingly, then walked out.

"Son, I will be at the mess hall at 1800, I am sure you can escort a General nyet? And I almost forgot! You have a briefing at 2000."

Great, my father here, and I must go on mission. Major Grachev strikes again. And Major Grachev must either be getting tired of writing notes, or just lazy.

"Da father, I will be there."

"Good, but you must be in uniform.... Ahh screw it! I am a General, I can tell some the sky is pink and they will accept it! We will dress in civilians, I am your father, and my son must dress accordingly."

That is another reason why I love my father, he is, to use the American term, cool. I smiled, but I must have to hurry back and change for the briefing. Oh well, I have gone through worse. He then paused.

"No, that would be bad for morale, to see the General and his son in civilians while others sweat in their flight uniforms, we will wear our flight uniforms."

Sometimes he can also change his mind, though I did see the point, and agreed. This was war, not peacetime. If it were that, then morale would be better. I routinely wore civilians on the flightline at Zhukovsky, only changing when necessary. Plus it may save some time anyway. He then left promptly, leaving me in wonderment about the world we live in. I sat on my bed, and felt a nap was in order. I still have a few hours before I must get up and take a shower. I only hope I had some breath mints. While it is no secret that Russian pilots drink on duty, it is bad form too. Those thoughts as well as others faded as I faded into sleep.

I awoke at 1644, with a slight hangover. I drowsily looked around, feeling tired, but once I moved around, I knew I would waken up. I lay there, again staring at the ceiling, listening to the jets takeoff, and the general noise associated with a busy airfield. I raised my head, and turned on the radio. Mainly Western music, but I needed some music. I was already bored and haven't woken up! I mentally calculated another half an hour I would take a shower, the mess hall only a ten minute's walk from here. No, make that twenty minutes, and getting up seemed like a chore as I waited for twenty minutes, lying there, listening to Western music. I then realized I had a few more minutes, and used that to get myself up. I shook my head, and cupped it in my head, and then groggily moved my feet onto the floor. I was not in the mood to do much. Vodka can do that to you, as well as dehydrate you, as my throat was dry. I had some bottled water, and I opened my refrigerator, and took a nice cool bottle out. I gingerly took a drink of the cool fluid, and it somewhat energized me. I then set it on the table, and took a ten minute shower. Feeling more awake as the minutes went on, I put on the flight uniform, and then proceeded outside, making sure I had everything.

Satisfied, I walked outside to the main doors, and lit up a cigarette. I continued to walk to the mess hall, minding myself, as well as others, as they saluted, or rarely I saluted. I felt like crap, and perhaps the vodka was not a good choice of drink earlier. I had found a breath mint, and made a mental note to go to what they called -the Americans- the "BX", which meant Base Exchange. I read a sign outside this facility, and AAFES says "we go where you go" I go many places, but never have I heard of this place. I must admit you can get some good things, but is limited, since it is only one squadron. Local stuff is more readily available.

I reached the mess hall by 1754, and finished my cigarette until my father showed up. When he did, he had a few of the base security personnel with him, as his bodyguards. I laughed inwardly as I saluted him. He returned it back and we went inside. The guards posted by the doors, and the whole mess hall quieted as my father entered.

Naturally I had to call attention, and I did, somewhat proudly. Then my father waved me away, and everybody continued on to what they were doing. General Arbatov was not in here, so I did not screw up. He has been known to chew up junior officers, and spit them back out. Some have ended up on CQ for quite some time. I have heard Sacha herself was put on CQ duty because of she lied to him about her flight condition. My father however, has told

me he had told Arbatov to pay us no mind, and let Major Grachev handle us. Major Grachev is capable of such a task. He talked to Arbatov while I was napping. My father obviously has business to take care of while here. Perhaps he is to evaluate a mission? Or participate? I was very curious as I went through the line, selecting the items I wished to eat. I sat down, and my father soon sat down across from me. It was not crowded, but it did feel stuffy. I guess my father, and me not telling anybody the fact made it seem that way. My father hungrily ate the food on the plate, and I did the same. We did not talk, as it is our custom in public. It is strange, but I feel my father likes to play political games too much. Then again comrades, if you were from Russia, and a General, wouldn't you?

We both finished our meal, and then promptly left. The furor that was going on continued on while we are eating, just I was not paying attention. I did not see Vasily for some reason. Perhaps they were on mission? or maybe just not the time they came. No matter, I still do not understand why he loathes me so much. We collected up our trays, and cleaned up after ourselves. I belched softly as I walked past the British pilots. One Cmdr. Troy Atkins nodded to me, and I nodded back. He must be under the same family relationship, as I saw recognition of my slight embarrassment to me. I do not act like I have a General for a father. It is not me. I guess more reason for people to inquire about me. I did not see Dimitri. Which was strange. Perhaps he is working on his fighter? I asked my father about this, and he said yes, he was working on his aircraft. I inquired what, and he said that he had brought an engine from Zhukovsky, on direct orders from President Putin to have it installed. My father of course is not a mechanic. Neither am I, when it comes to engines, so I let the ground teams worry about that. I have looked over maintenance, and know the basic workings, that is all.

We stepped outside, and I pulled out a cigarette, only to be offered one by my father. I shrugged, and accepted. Though I must admit his are too harsh for me. He says when your lungs are almost gone, you need to be reminded that they are being burned away! Perhaps he is right, I have been too busy to go running. I have no appreciation for it, but it must be done to keep yourself fit. I lit the cigarette, and we stood off to the side, watching the airfield, and how busy it is during wartime. Though it seemed no different from peacetime. I saw a couple A-10s, along with a couple 586th MiG-29s in tow. Perhaps Sacha is escorting a strike mission? The IRLF does not field advanced combat aircraft, but an F-4E can be a threat to the A-10. It is only too bad that the Su-25T is not in service. I would like to try that aircraft. Surely my father has?

After finishing the smoke, my father told the guards to go back to their other duties, he has his son, and did not require their service. The Sergeant saluted, and his men left. He waved me to the UAZ, and asked where he wanted to go. He gave me a look as if I asked to slit his throat.

"To the hangar naturally!"

Fathers.

"Da General!"

I said slightly sarcastically. He looked at me for a second, harshly, then a smile broke free from his face.

"Pavel, you are lucky you are my son!"

I was.

"Da General!"

"Drive Lieutenant!"

He barked, still smiling. Often we joke about the relationship we have to endure as military personnel, but naturally comrades you can have fun when your relatives are in it as well. So we drove to the hangar, in good spirits. I parked the vehicle, and we went through the security checks, and entered. My father turned to my aircraft. I noticed

something different. There was a wolf or dog on the side of the aircraft, where it was blank. I looked at my father, who only smiled.

"It is on the other side too son. Your grandfather served in WWII during the Great Patriotic War, and that symbol was on his aircraft. We have had a history of pilots in our family since the Rodina could itself own aircraft. You are the third generation to carry on this tradition. I have had this symbol on my aircraft, though regulations only allowed us to put it inside the nosewheel doors, or somewhere in the cockpit. I carried it in the cockpit. It is the symbol representing the fighter pilot, the hunter of other people, and to kill them. It is not a grand occupation, to kill, but it must be done. I have learned that lesson flying the Gratch, where at some times, you can see the people who were trying to kill us. He was of course a fighter pilot, not mudmovers like us son. Perhaps why you have been in this unit, my genes have passed on, and we now hunt on the ground, as much as the air. This war is maybe not as 'Patriotic' as World War II, but with Sheikh Mutquedah, it may be one of his Holy Wars. So I had Sergeant Pomovin put these on."

I was impressed however, not too offended at the markings. They how you say? "*meshed?*" with the aircraft. It was almost one. The bomb markings were there, in the same spot. I nonchalantly looked at the time. I had 45 minutes to be at the briefing. I walked around to the other side, and nodded, the fighter symbols still there. I must read up on this unit that this wolf came from. It is curious how we mark our aircraft during wartime. Perhaps it is the realization that we become personal with our vehicles, and aircraft pilots are no different. I bet General Arbatov must not like our camouflage schemes. For the Russian military, it is wholly unorthodox, especially with the 586th GvIAP. My aircraft at certain angles does blend in with the countryside. I have not strayed away from the blue. For it seems to also "mesh" with the plane. I have long since understood the grey for the ground combat, while the blue reminds me that it is still an air combat fighter. Talons for all occasions. I nodded, I accepted this.

Then I went to Sergeant Gennedy, and then we chatted for a few minutes. He said his crew is to be ready to depart at 2300, location unknown. I looked at my father, but did not stare, I will probably find out in the briefing. Sgt. Gennedy also mentioned the specific loading of the aircraft. I was to retain the air-to-air missiles, but I was to carry two anti-radiation missiles, and two Kh-29Ls. Indeed it must be a high priority target, even though my aircraft is cleared to fire the Kh-23 and -25ML missiles. I nodded and let him attend to his preparations. Whenever I return from a mission, the aircraft is immediately removed of all air to ground ordnance. Only air-to-air missiles are left in place. It is more of a personal requirement, rather than operational. I can choose between the R-77 and R-73 missiles, but I usually leave the AIM-120s where they are at. Using them seemed like a great privilege, like a little boy allowed to always play with his favorite toy. I have come to realize that the AIM-120 when used on my aircraft, has degraded capabilities. It is no matter, I prefer medium range missiles. I do not have the inclination to get in close with an opponent, merely keep him as far away as possible so I can escape.

I nodded thoughtfully as I saw the crew already begin to load the aircraft. I watched them as they hoisted each missile onto it's launch rail. Within 20 minutes my aircraft was ready to strike out at whatever target I was supposed to hit tonight? I did not want to make presumptions. I walked around slowly, as the loaders stood by. The connections were attached properly, and the customary shake did leave them where they were mounted. Good.

My father watched the spectacle, a slight glimmer in his eyes. The method was fairly simple. Sgt. Gennedy has a team of a total of ten personnel, including him. For this aircraft it probably requires less, but then again, the multitude of responsibilities a ground crew is daunting. First you have to maintain the aircraft, which requires at least two. So that leaves eight personnel. Four weapons loaders, and the rest just there to do other necessities which I'm sure you can imagine. But Sgt. Gennedy does not care if you are a radar mechanic, you have muscles as well as brains, so if you have them, why not use them? At times I am the eleventh person, but sometimes I cannot always be there.

Some of the crew has complained earlier on, but Sgt. Gennedy found some way to stop them complaining, at least openly. They have to accept it is simply not my job to do the grunt work. I have no problem when the need arises, but I must plan.

The thought of planning brought the other thing. I must leave for the briefing. I do want to be early after all, it is expected of me, especially when my father was here! I motioned to my watch, and my father took his cue. I nodded to Sgt. Gennedy, and we walked back into the UAZ, me driving of course. We sat in silence, perhaps the nature of our job has humbled us? I pulled onto the main briefing building, and noticed I was early. Fifteen minutes, giving me time to smoke a quick one before sitting down. As I smoked I looked towards the takeoff ramp, and I noticed Dimitri's aircraft unfolding it's wings. Unguided bombs lined the wings of the aircraft, as well as anti-radiation missiles. It seems that he's doing a combat testing of his engine. It is sad that matters prevent a simple test flight, but he was the one to fly it anyway. I continued to watch as he accelerated down the ramp, then flew off, turning south. I had wondered immediately what mission he had to perform today. I finished the smoke, then tossed the butt in the butt can beside the door. My father patiently waited, then we went inside. I entered the briefing room, with Major Grachev stood at the briefing desk, looking over some papers. Col Martin was also in there. It seemed that this was no ordinary briefing. I entered the room quietly, with the two of them glancing at me, then going back to their paperwork. As soon as my father entered, I called the room to attention, and they immediately stood up, as well as I. My father only nodded.

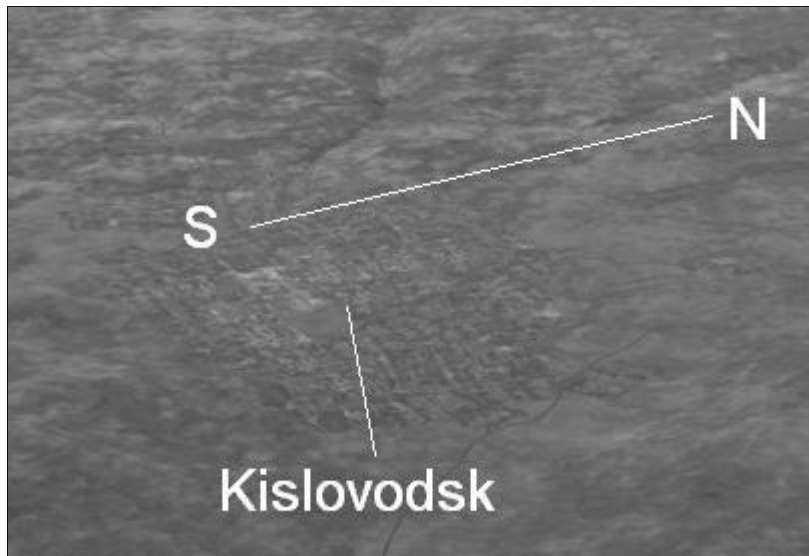
"Sit down gentleman, I trust the briefing is to start?"

"Yes General, if you would sit there please?"

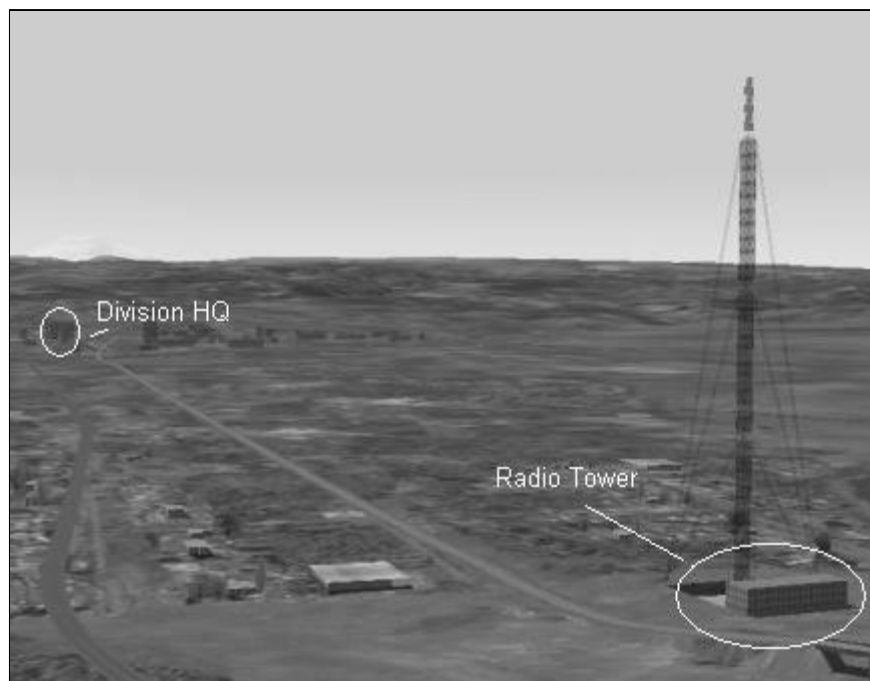
Major Grachev motioned to a seat that offered the overall view of the briefing area. Next to that sat a small rolling table, which had tall tea glasses on it. I sat in my customary spot, and Major Grachev cleared his throat, and he started.

"Yesterday we came upon the location of the Divisional HQ of the IRLF 33rd Heavy Division. Unmanned Aerial Vehicles noted the amount of traffic, and we quickly worked up a strike plan. It is in the city center of Kislovodsk."





He brought up images of the area, showing each view, as well as general target views.



Then he showed the picture of a radio tower similar to the one that Sacha had destroyed last week.



"Additionally, Sheikh Mutqedah has begun his propaganda machine again, with it disseminating his religious overtones. Unlike the one destroyed in Guduata, this one is firmly under his control. This is not your primary target, but is a secondary target in which you have to destroy. The main emphasis is of course the Division HQ. With that destroyed, naturally we hope to sow confusion against here..."

He brought up a small aerial footage of a town.

"This is the town of Bekeshevskaja, where the 33rd is expected to make it's main thrust. Unfortunately this is the weakest part of the current front lines, and the 41st Guards Division is expected to not hold the area for long. While we have yet to locate the Brigade headquarters, which may be located near the Division one. They currently do not have any assets that far north near the border for us to target yet. They are remaining very good at hiding their lower echelon headquarters, but a Divisional one is a target you cannot pass up."

He looked toward my Dad, who nodded for Major Grachev to go on.

"There is a Kub battery located at the eastern part of town, as well as ZSU-23-4 systems. We believe the current mix of weaponry should allow you to soften up the area allowing you unrestricted flight into and out of the area. Other threats may be attack helicopters. Though they are of the Mi-24 variety, and should not pose too much of an aerial threat. Also, an occasional F-4 flight may come around. That of course is your primary threat, at least aerial. Do not waste too much fuel engaging them. There is a Combat Air Patrol of two 27th Fighter Squadron F-15s planned when you are in the area, and should be up when you begin your flight."

He looked towards Colonel Martin, who merely nodded.

"They will be there Major."

"Right now current air operations is Lt. Emenevich currently supporting the advance of the 31st Motorized Rifle Brigade, as well as the US 1st Armored Division near the border. He is engaged in a limited CAS role to supplement the Georgian Su-25 Squadron at Guduata. Other operations are the Canadians are still performing an alert intercept role, should the need arise. The 586th is still in a support role, performing both intercept, as well as ground attack duties. The US 23rd Fighter Group is performing a CAS role in support of the US 1st Armored Divisions, while the Georgians are supporting the 31st MRB. Fighting is generally heavy around the more passable

areas, particularly the valleys that can support armored movement. The terrorists around Guduata continually harass friendly forces as well as intermittent mortar attacks on the airfield."

"Air threats in the area continue to be a low level of threat. Occasionally the IRLF is sending up flights, only to be shot down. It is unknown how many aircraft remain in their inventory, but the GRU and friendly intelligence estimate only as much as they can bring from Iran at a time. Since they have limited aerial refueling aircraft, it is interesting what they are doing to bring them here."

He paused, took a sip of a glass of water, then continued.

"The ground situation is pretty active, with the front heavily engaged. The 31st MRB is making slow advance while taking losses. So far not severe, but it is affecting future operations. 1st Armored Division is taking lighter losses, given it's relative size. Armored Battalions are slowly advancing, destroying the Iranian armor that has been thrown against them. The SAM threat is still very heavy, with numerous MANPAD systems engaging fighters in valleys, as well as systems at Tkvarcheli, Kislovodsk, and Sukhumi. Plus the numerous systems that support the individual ground units."

My Dad nodded.

"That is good, a good overall briefing. So why does the east concern us Vladimir?"

"Because there is an expected push north by the IRLF forces."

Major Grachev replied coolly. He did not like being asked child's questions.

"I see, what forces do we have there?"

"41st Guards Division, they have taken minor casualties, but the push at Bekeshevskaja could change the situation. If we hold the town, then we can push towards Kislovodsk, should reinforcements arrive."

"They will be relieved by the 51st Heavy Division, in one day, should everything go to plan."

My father replied evenly. While it is a matter of Army Generals to discuss, you must work with them, so you must understand the big picture. It is natural to support operations, you have to understand them. Besides, targets are derived from supporting that movement. But one element was missing. What time do I take off?

"As for your part Aleksei, you will fly to Guduata tonight, I trust your aircraft is ready to fly?"

"Yes Comrade Major, when I left the munitions are fully loaded, but I must check on the fuel state."

"It is no concern right now. You are to fly to Guduata within one hour. You will stay there overnight, then takeoff after 0530 tomorrow morning. Estimated flight time would be an hour or so. Weather is predicted to be clear, however turbulence at low levels, as well as in the mountains will affect the mission. You should have enough fuel to make the trip to the target area, given a Hi-Lo-Hi profile. Of course, major diversion will be to Guduata, but return here to Sochi-Adler upon completion of your mission. That is all."

Major Grachev looked at my father, for any further commentary.

During the briefing, General Karmarov simply hummed a tune in his head, *"Kiss Me, Kislovodsk."* It was sung by a street musician, playing the balalaika very slowly to the song. Street musicians in that city were aplenty as well. He already knew the situation here, he just made Major Grachev do it because of formalities. Plus you must test your junior officers as much as humanly possible. Major Grachev so far was doing an excellent job, if in fact he only had

two people under his control. For any pilot, it was the best situation. Field grade officer took care of the paperwork, while they maintained their aircraft, as well as flew the missions. Major Grachev himself could fly the aircraft, he was part of the initial batch of pilots in the original Su-33 program, himself a former member of the 2nd Squadron, 279th KIAP. The song he sung in his head was one he heard while on vacation in that very city. He thought of the wonderful time he and his dead wife had. That is where they conceptualized Aleksei, though he strongly felt right now that Aleksei did not need to know that particular tidbit of information. The very city he was to attack is where he was started. The irony made him laugh slightly inside, as the tune played in his head. He only stopped when Major Grachev ended his briefing.

"I will talk with you if you have nothing else. Aleksei, good luck."

Was all he said. I took it I was to leave immediately, my father hopefully would stay here so we can do more bonding. I stood up at attention, saluted crisply, then left promptly. I went straight to the UAZ, then drove to the hangar. I did not think too much about the mission, other the time I had to take off tonight. I wondered why a divert to Guduata, stay overnight, then fly a mission from there? It seemed like something was going on that I could not fathom. Perhaps this was their idea of trying to be secret. But a fighter like the Su-33 cannot be held a secret for too long. I could only figure the distance factor, but if at 100 percent fuel load, the Su-33 can average three thousand kilometers, especially with the weapons configuration I possessed. I parked the UAZ, then walked inside. The crew was finishing up fueling the aircraft. The ATZ-10 was moved to it's customary parking spot, while the other crew members closed the covers, ensuring they were properly sealed. I walked up to Sgt. Gennedy, who was supervising the whole operation.

"Comrade Lieutenant, the aircraft is fueled up fully."

He said under an exasperated breath. It must have taken a miracle to get it fueled, though I knew such problems existed. Maybe they had to get other things taken care of?

"Spasiba my friend. Are you in a hurry?"

"Yes sir, we have but twenty minutes to board the helicopter that will take us to Guduata. I have only room to take five personnel, including me."

That was good, at least he would not leave me in the ropes over there! I felt assured that the mission would go smoothly. I myself had thirty minutes.

"I trust that the rest will help me takeoff?"

"Da, they will." Was all he said.

"Good! then I will let you attend to your matters, I will see you later Comrade Sergeant."

"Dasvidanya sir, and good flight."

He said with a smile. It was only a small hop anyway, but it is a matter of formalities.

The thirty minutes did not drag on, as I re-inspected the aircraft again and again, just to pass the time. The aircraft was satisfactory as usual. I must really take the time to clean this thing. I am surprised that I have not been reprimanded for it's appearance. General wear and tear was a common thing, but this aircraft had been put through a lot! I checked my watch. I had fifteen minutes, and I must get going. I climbed the stepladder, and Private Molenko assisted me. I checked all the air hoses, as well as the helmet. I set it on my head, and went through the checks. Private Molenko gave a thumbs up, and he stepped down, and removed the ladder. I looked down, and the other crew member waved for me, clear to turn on the engines. I nodded, then started the APU. Unlike the other

Russian jets, this one had an onboard one, so I did not require a separate ground vehicle. It is necessary for quick missions. The time of placing the vehicle can take time. And while we are not inundated with missions such as other units, we still have to be able to respond to on-call missions if necessary. Plus we keep incompetent crews out of the equation. My crew, as well as Dimitri's are the best we've seen. I really must get Sgt. Gennedy promoted. I heard the whine of the engines fill the hangar, and the ground crew pulled the chocks, and I was free to go. I turned on the radio, and requested taxi permission. It was quickly granted, as usual during war. You must really laugh at the tower and base personnel. Sometimes they will break the rules for survival. Then again so have I.

I normally taxi with the canopy up. It is more or less the American style, and it does not impinge any safety hazards that I know of. So I taxied from the hangar quietly, in my head anyway, the helmet does a good job of muffling the jet engines. I heard some air traffic, then approached the ramp, and aligned my aircraft. Generally I did not monitor the tactical frequency a lot, as it does put a lot of noise in your head, trying to track the battle. The sun was almost set, and the air was naturally clear. It was summer time, so very little clouds appeared. It was supposed to rain in a couple of days, but that is nothing. I have flown in worse in the 115th. Instead I monitored the tower frequency, and picked up a female voice on the radio comms. It was not Sacha, but another one. She was talking about "Reaper". I did know this was not a Russian call-sign, but probably American. It was telling the "Reaper" that "Hammer", my flight was about to take off. It struck me as odd. But then again, I let it pass. We were known, but not well known by the base personnel. Our aircraft did stand out.

I closed the canopy, then unfolded the wings. I keyed the radio.

"Tower, Hammer flight requests takeoff."

"Hammer flight, this is tower, you are cleared for takeoff."

Came the female voice. Perhaps she is as good looking as her voice?

"Roger, out."

With that, I dropped the flaps, then held the wheelbrake as I advanced the throttle to full military power. I did not need to waste precious fuel, even for this short hop to Guduata. The aircraft, held by the brakes, pushed against them, and I released them, sending the aircraft west, the airbase sliding by. I gave the aircraft a couple inputs of up trim, and the nose gently raised up, and then when I was at 280km/h, I pulled gently on the stick, and soon enough, the aircraft was airborne. I immediately retracted the gear, and let the aircraft fly forward to build up speed, then retracted the flaps. After a little bit, I banked left and headed for Guduata. I stayed at 1000m, just to view the coastline better. It was such a beautiful one. Like the mountains, the war has turned them somewhat into charred areas. I saw one house, even at this distance, on fire. Perhaps a terrorist attack? I punched up our own tactical frequency, the "internal" one.

"Hammer 12, Hammer 11."

"Hammer12." Came a clipped reply from Dimitri, he must be busy. Then after a few minutes.

"Hammer 11, this is Hammer 12, I was in the middle of a latrine break, must you call at that time?"

"I thought you were working, not playing with yourself."

A chuckle came across the radio.

"Just giving these bastards some hell, I think I got one of those pesky Shilkas though. There are plenty in the Sukhumi area, so be careful if you are going that way."

I nodded to myself.

"Any air threats?"

"Da, I managed to get me an Mi-24 outside of town. Bastard tried to attack me with his nose cannon. I reminded the fool with an R-73 to never mess with fighters. The other one escaped and I could not maneuver effectively anyway."

"Good!, I am going to Guduata, I have a mission tomorrow morning."

"Ahh, I see, checking out the local girls I see."

"Nyet, I have a real mission you pervert, some people work around here."

Another chuckle.

"Ah hah! So you work too around here! Mother Russia can sleep safer now! But I myself am returning to base, I think those IRLF soldiers can sleep badly knowing I can lay down high explosives like the best of them!"

Dimitri had only 23 ground targets to his credit, though I think today he would at least make thirty. His past week of not flying has put him behind. He still has yet to down an enemy fighter.

"So is your engine functioning properly?"

"Da, it is working nominally so far."

"Good, I am about to enter the ILS approach, I will see you tomorrow."

"Dasvidanya..."

Then the radio went quiet. I switched to the tower frequency.

"Guduata Tower, Hammer 11 requests landing permission."

"Hammer 11, this is Guduata tower, runway is clear, visibility good, no wind."

"Thank you Guduata, I am coming in."

The landing of course was uneventful, and I had parked my aircraft without incident. The hangar had a cot in there, set up by the other ground crews presumably. I had seen numerous craters from the persistent mortar attacks. The Georgians were busily readying their aircraft for another sortie. The cycle was less than Sochi-Adler, but busy nonetheless. I saw a couple Canadian F/A-18Cs taxi past by me, perhaps preparing for another GAI intercept mission. They did not have the capability to use Russian bombs, so they performed the on-call intercept role. I had heard that Colonel Martin wanted to expand their role. It was a shame they could not do more. Their more than capable aircraft would surely turn the tide, and perhaps give us less to do as well. About twenty minutes later I had seen an Mi-8 approach, and could only guess that was my ground crew arriving. Then another twenty minutes later, Sgt. Gennedy disembarked from a Ural truck, along with the rest of the ground crew. They immediately checked the aircraft. I had put the chocks on myself, since it made no sense to wait for somebody else to do it, when I was perfectly capable. Besides they were not that heavy themselves. After another thirty minutes, the aircraft was fully ready for tomorrow's mission. I heard a loud explosion, then alert sirens. I guess it was another mortar attack. I am surprised the Guduata police cannot find these pesky insurgents. After that, the base quieted down. A Captain had come by and checked on to see if we had been hurt, or any equipment damaged. We obviously said no, and the Captain left. Sgt. Gennedy already put his crew down for the night, and we stood outside, smoking together.

"So what do you plan to do once this war is over?" Gennedy asked.

"I do not know Gennedy."

Unlike most people, he did not use the alternate names that we Russians give to ourselves. Very odd.

"Perhaps I will vacation in the Baltics, I have not been there much."

"I plan to just relax for a few days, maybe a week."

He said as he let out a cloud of smoke, followed by a cough.

"I think the Bahamas look good right now."

I laughed, they looked good any time of the year. I had finished my smoke, and tossed the butt in a trash filled gas can.

"I must get some sleep comrade."

"Da, so do I."

Gennedy tossed his butt in the same can, and we both bedded for the night. No dreams came to me, and Gennedy woke me up gently.

"Sir, it is time to wake up....."

"Nyet, it is not."

"Da Lieutenant, or I will report to the high command of your reluctance to wake up."

I heard a tone of sarcasm in that.

"Then they can send me to Southern Russia and fight against the IRLF."

I lay there, eyes open, looking at the top of the hangar. The smell also assaulted me. I had grown used to it, but never enjoyed it either. I looked at my watch, 0430. Groaning, I sat up slowly, Sgt. Gennedy rousting the other soldiers. Why must I be woken up first? I rubbed my face in my hands, and realized, I had to go to the bathroom. Standing up, I found the latrine. It stank of urine, of lack of cleaning. Perhaps they put us in a "transit" hangar? I nevertheless took care of what was needed, then tried to turn on the faucet. No water, but the toilet at least flushed. Shrugging, I found some bottled water that the crew had brought with them. I washed my hands, and doused my head with some water. I would shave when I got back to Sochi, as I did not bring my razor. I think the High Command would tolerate just one day of insubordination. After my morning cigarette, and eating a little bit of a bad tasting ration, I went through the pre-flight checks, just to make sure nothing happened while I was asleep. Everything was satisfactory as usual, and then I exited the hangar, bringing the aircraft to the ready parking position.

I sat there in the cool morning air, going over the mission as I heard little on the tactical frequency. The orbiting E-3A Sentry, called out contacts, slow moving ones, possibly helicopters heading north. Vicinity was the Kislovodsk area. It appeared that while the IRLF could not field a large number of combat aircraft, rotary-wing aircraft were of course more readily available. They operated our own Soviet supplied Mi-24 attack helicopters. They apparently started to locally manufacture them, according to the intelligence reports, so we should be seeing them more often, especially here. It was one of the most dangerous helicopters, at least to the ground troops, who regarded it as a flying tank.

I checked my watch, 0520. In ten minutes I would be on my way, off to another crazy mission. The E-3 also called off two fast movers. F-4s, but they were not within range. I heard another callsign, Pegasus answer in confirmation, I would guess it was the F-15C CAP that Colonel Martin said would be there. That was good.

I looked over the route, and agreed that the routes are becoming more sensible. I would follow this route. I had my first waypoint at the predicted threat zone of the Kub, which was good. I was to ingress sometime before that however, and planned on as soon as I left the mountain range. I thought however that might leave me open to attack, so I will monitor the Link-16 from the E-3A periodically during the first leg of the flight. And during my low level ingress, I would be able to follow a river that led straight into the city, should I become disoriented. I had to watch out for AAA systems, but none were reported along that route, so I will take the chance today. Then there was the concern of the helicopters, and especially the two other aircraft, more than likely F-4s. I have heard of no other aircraft. Not even the vaunted Tomcat. Iglas were always a concern.



At 0530, I started the engines, then got permission to taxi to the takeoff ramp. I saw the lights of the Mi-8 transport, and saw it takeoff shortly thereafter. By the time I would be lined up, they should be out of the flight path, allowing takeoff with no problems. I powered up the aircraft again, with the APU. Once the engine gauges reported the appropriate thrust, I left the canopy open. It is my habit to leave it open while I taxi. It reminds me of life, and perhaps the ones I may take away, such as this morning. I engaged the auto throttle around 10 - 20 km/h. This is a good respectable taxi speed. Besides the rush of the wind does not bother you while the aircraft taxis, and lets you, "reflect" I believe the term is? Yes, it allows me to think of things while I start the journey of destiny.

I lined up the aircraft near perfect, a little too much pressure on the left rudder pedal, and I almost put my aircraft in the grass! Once I recovered, I aligned properly, then put the throttle to idle, and then disengaged the auto throttle, then used the brakes of the aircraft. The whine of the engines permeated the air, and I was almost set. I closed the canopy first, then unfolded the wings. I visually check to make sure they properly come down. It would not do good if I cannot fly. Once I was sure, I requested, and got permission to takeoff. Once permission was granted, I chose not to use afterburner, as it may compromise my fuel situation. The Su-33 without refueling could fly 3000 kilometers with the load I was carrying. Of course, altitude of flight affects this, but I was sure I had more than plenty.

The aircraft again fought the wheel brakes, and after a few seconds of dropping the flaps, and adjusting the trim, I let go, and the aircraft, unhinged, ate the ground with the mouth that is painted on the radome. Once I reached 300 km/h on the HUD, I gently pulled on the stick, and the aircraft took off. What became immediately clear is that the turbulence would affect flight at the lower altitudes I was going to operate at.



I generally do not do this comrades, but I decided that engaging the autopilot would be the best situation, at least for the flight over the mountains. I did that, and immediately, the aircraft decided that afterburner was approved. I grunted at the g's that assaulted my body, and simply let the aircraft pilot itself. While it was turning south, I felt something hit my left leg. A brown paper bag. I had some thoughts of a bomb comrades! But I secured it, as you do not need a foreign object bouncing around your cockpit. It could hit a button that will put you out of flight. I opened it, and realized that Sgt. Gennedy had made a morning snack for me. Comrades, this is reason why you treat your crews with the utmost care. Had I not treated them with respect, I just may have had a bomb in there! Inside was a container, of apple juice. I do not drink apple juice most often, as usually it is not good, but the Americans bring some of the best kinds, so I felt like I had to indulge. Perhaps it was from the Canadians? He had also put in a cheese and ham croissant wrapped in plastic. Like I said, if you have the time to eat, I would suggest you take the opportunity! So I had drank the apple juice, which was very good, and refreshing, my throat dry from the cigarette. I had been too focused on the mission to simply not drink too many fluids, and was still waking up.



My body responded favorably, and I ate the croissant as soon as I had hit the front range of the mountains. It was still dark out, and my instruments looked nominal. I had unzipped a pocket in my flight suit, and put the trash in there. After that I had managed the tactical frequency, noticing some slight turbulence when I got closer to some mountains. I put my hand on the stick, but did not grasp it too hard. Too many inexperienced pilots have this tendency to immediately grasp it, and send their aircraft into an uncontrolled state. The turbulence was not too bad. The reason I do this comrades, is to take immediate control of the aircraft should it somehow lose control. It is rare, but when you are dealing with sheer rock faces, your concern of such matters is of high importance!

Russian-IRLF Border

The smell inside the T-80 was oppressive, even at this early morning. Sweat, cordite from firing tank shells overpowered Lt. Bagerev as he scanned the horizon from his position in Bekeshevskaja. His "Company" was not really in the position to defend the town. What he did not understand was that the Battalion Commander was saying that this was a strategic position along the border, and the IRLF forces were going to push through into Russia. He lit a cigarette, along with the gunner. In peacetime he would have gotten a severe reprimand, but in wartime soldiers disregard the most basic safety rules. Besides, he may not live today anyway. He looked around, and saw the Company's only ZSU-23-4. The vehicle sat there, motionless, no doubt one of the crew members awake. They had to be. The 51st was slated to replace them, and this was their only defense against the murderous F-4s. It so happened that the pilots figured out how to drop from higher, negating the only air defense asset they have. Command said they would send more, but right now it was lacking. Not that he would see them go away, just he wished for something more effective. The Shilka was too easy to defeat under most conditions.

He felt a nudge on his left shoulder, and keeping the smoke out of the hatch, he leaned towards his gunner, who handed him a part of the rations. He took it slowly, careful not to bump anything. The autoloader had a tendency to catch on the uniform, and that would mean he would get a medal for messing up severely. Opening the package, and eating whatever it was, he resumed scanning the horizon with his binoculars. His orders to the rest of the tanks was to report only when contact was established. So far nothing was established, other than the rations tasted like dog droppings. He paused his eating. Was that a jet coming in?

Hammer-11

Luckily the turbulence was not too bad, and the aircraft passed on. The tactical frequency was alive at the moment, with the Pegasus flight requesting and getting a vector to the hostiles. When the operator is talking to me I found out, they talk as Overlord. They have a Russian controller in the NATO AWACS, and he takes care of the Russians, while the Americans go by the "Olympus" callsign. Most strange that they do it this way. The hostiles turned out to be the same contacts, heading for Bekeshevskaja. Perhaps I will get lucky today and also get some aircraft? I will see. Before I reached Waypoint 1, my IP, I switched to the air-to-air mode to verify the air action.



While of course my primary mission was not intercept, every strike pilot must glean as much as he can about the airspace around him. To not do this would bring your death. While I could have switched to the air-to-ground submode, I did not matter to me, as it was just a push of a button. The contacts were definitely heading towards Bekeshevskaja, and I attempted to lock up the left most contact. I assumed it would be the jet fighters, then a contact off to my direct right. I guessed it was a CAP patrol that had not detected me. Good. I attempted to lock up

this contact, but the radar would not. I tried a few more times, then after a couple minutes, I obtained lock. The target was out of range for my AIM-120s, and I felt that the R-77s would be no better. If I had R-27REs, I probably would have had a chance of engaging this contact. After leaving the mountain range, I intended to pursue this fighter/helicopter, then move on to the HQ. However, I need to concentrate on the mission at hand, and I could tell from the radio traffic the F-15Cs were enroute. Let them have a kill too.



I switched to A2G submode, then checked the Kh-31Ps, which still gave a green light. I attempted to lock on any source of radiation, in order to prepare the objective. This is an artillery term, which you fire ahead of the main attack, to eliminate any defenders, or reduce their numbers. However, I could not obtain a lock, so I began my descent, when trying again, oriented towards the target area. I got a lock! And I immediately fired. I was taking a chance when firing this far out, as I could only hit perhaps a Dog Ear radar.

But there was a Kub out there, and as I got to lower levels, I noticed the turbulence was not too bad. I waited and got locked up by another system! Perhaps the Kub? I had to wait however, because the Kh-31p, even at it's maximum speed, takes time at distance. I tried to force the aircraft downward, but with the turbulence, and the time of the morning forced me to last quite a while under it's lock. But the Kub does take some time to actually launch it's missile at me, so I had some respite. I kept the targeting system locked on the first acquisition, in order to track the missile's progress.

When the "NP" cue went away, I figured I had hit it, or broke line-of-sight with the system. I pressed the lock button again, and got another acquisition. Hoping this was the infernal Kub, I raised the nose to "loft" the remaining Kh-31p at this.

I then began my low level approach to the target area. It was very quick, and my MFD was zoomed out so I had no spatial awareness. I then zoomed back in, in order to understand my attack profile.





Two aerial targets in front of me! I quickly activated the radar, and locked on the first dash. The AIM-120 quickly left the wingtip rail, and at that same time I got the "merged" message from Overlord. I saw the fireball in front of me, but there was still one more!



011, Overlord, Mergec



I quickly maneuvered the designator box onto the second one, and then locked and fired. The other AIM-120 flew into that one and dispatched it. I had no time to figure out just what I had shot down, but then I heard Olympus vectoring the F-15s onto an aircraft over Bekeshevskaja.



I had no time to reorient because by that time, I was over Kislovodsk. I saw the radio tower off to my left, and did not have the time to engage it. Besides, if Command cannot stand the music, they should use a cruise missile. I overshot the city, with a lock on by another aircraft! I figured it was the F-15C, so I hoped anyway. I pulled a rather extensive escape maneuver, ejecting APP-50 combined chaff-flare cartridges, giving any remaining civilians a fireworks display. Switching to A2G mode, I assessed no Igla threat, perhaps they were praying? I did something that was not expected deep into enemy territory, a half-loop. I realized my mistake almost halfway up, but I was committed, there was no turning back from this. Immediately the Kh-29Ls were ready, and the spotter called while I was being pushed into the seat.

"Hammer 11 this is Viper over."

"Da, I am here..." I said through gritted teeth, can't they wait?

"Roger, are you in position to view our designation?"

"Nyet, give me a couple minutes." Surely they wear night vision goggles?

"Roger, let us know when you are ready."

"Da! designate!"

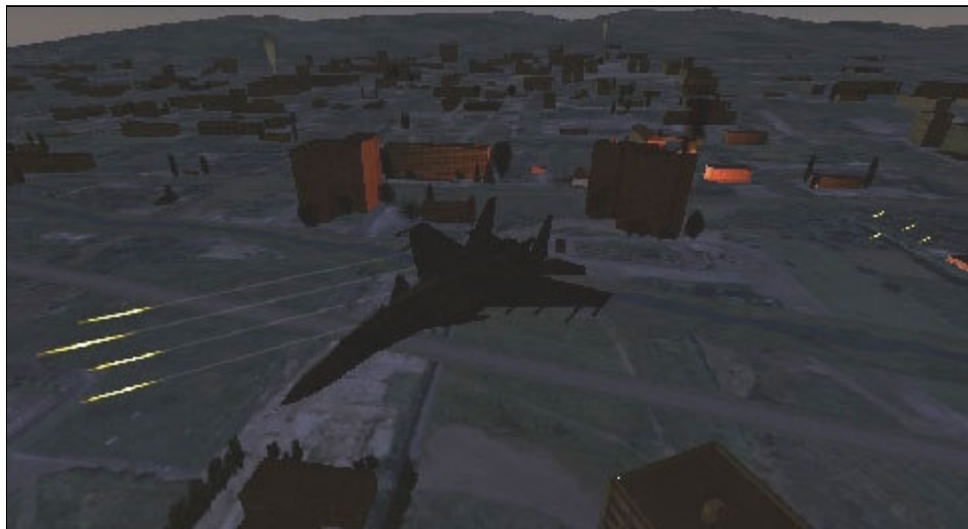
My aircraft came out of the half loop, and I came over the top, and leveled my wings.



The Kh-29L in it's current pylon drops down, so I must ensure that the weapon clears my weapon properly. Five-hundred kilograms bouncing around my airframe is not good!. I activated the seeker system, and the blasted thing would not acquire properly! I tried again a few times, and it looked like it was tracking properly. I was still not in range, so I flew towards the HQ, expecting finally some Iglas to be showing up. However, I caught the whiff of another system, perhaps AAA? I was committed, and when I was in range, I fired.

The missile flew into another building in the way! I could not let any civilian deaths be on my head! I was about to abort, when I closed better, then I fired the second time. I had followed the missile in, heedless of whatever must be out there, and I did not know if I had killed the Shilka nearest to the HQ building, or the one to my right wing, but the Kub was definitely dead, or this story would have been more exciting!

The missile impacted right in the lobby. It blew outwards and inwards, perhaps incinerating some Generals. The time to go was here, and I felt guilty of not having enough munitions to destroy the radio station, but my guilt slipped away, as I raced north, dodging AAA fire off to my left.



I ducked past some buildings, and apparently I broke the lock the Shilka had on me. I got the tone of being locked on by a fighter, but I saw no enemy aircraft pointed in my direction. Later on one of the F-15C pilots said it was me, and I was grateful that it was, or maybe I would not be telling this story! I did however see one over Bekeshevskaja,

and since that was part of my egress route.....

I went to BVR mode, and the two R-77s I had left showed green lights. I locked and fired one R-77. I was almost at merge before I felt that I had missed.



I judged from the information on the target that it had been shot down, but then it started to level out, then dive. I was not sure, so since I was almost over friendly lines, I chose to fire my last R-77. This one flew true and hit the target. By the rapid descent I knew I had hit the aircraft. It flew into the ground. I did not see any survivors, and then again, it was still early morning.



At this time I was clean of any stores, save my GSh-301. I am skilled, but not stupid. I immediately went low, and skirted Bekeshevskaja. I could see the fires from the attacking aircraft and I could not help the grunts on the ground, but hoped that they did not suffer too many casualties. So I flew NW for a few minutes, and once safe into Russian territory, I engaged the autopilot, and flew home.



I reflected, as my adrenaline slowed, that I was an ace? Do helicopters count when you are considered for acceptance? I thought about it, and it did not matter to me. I had a total of six aircraft shot down! I had done well today comrades, and the destruction of the HQ building was good as well. Perhaps we can mount our own offensive in a day or two, and push back these IRLF mongrels. Other than my victory roll that nearly got me working the CQ desk, the flight and landing was uneventful.

Later on that day, I had realized the last aircraft I had shot down was an IRLF F-4 Phantom attacking the Armored Company that was there. The aircraft assigned to escort this particular aircraft had flown on, perhaps due to stupidity, or radio failure. The F-15Cs however managed to catch up to that aircraft, and destroy it. Apparently the IRLF pilot stayed out of the defending Shilka's threat zone, and had destroyed it, along with some buildings, as well as two tanks. It was a coordinated push by the IRLF, and we had stopped it before it had begun. Or I had *by accident*.

The two other aerial targets turned out to be two Mi-24s enroute to provide CAS for the IRLF forces. I found this out from an American buddy, who said he was watching CNN, and there were reports of a lone aircraft engaging two helicopters. Apparently the engagement was videotaped, at least from the Mi-24s perspective. Major Grachev allowed me the helicopters, and so I became an ace! The only other one I knew was Sacha.

The IRLF was trying to push the border town with six of their tanks. If I had not engaged the F-4, or the Hinds, more comrades would have died earlier this morning. I watched the video, courtesy of my father, who I told the whole story to. It showed the helicopters heading north, and then started to dodge something. One exploded, then the other. I then heard the sound of a jet, and smiled.

This was recorded by an Al-Jazeera crew, which CNN obtained. The reporter did not record my attack on the HQ building, because he or she apparently was arrested, and the video showed that. The building I struck was filled with military personnel, and Intel predicts that they were the top echelons of the Division. There were apparently some Turkish advisors in that building as well, so comrades, Turkey may come back into the fight.

For that day however, I had received the Medal of Courage for actions. Then I set to work on painting the three kill markers for my aircraft.



System Specs

- Sony VAIO notebook
- 2.80 GHz CPU
- 448MB RAM
- ATi IGP 345M video card
- WindowsXP Home
- Microsoft Sidewinder Precision 2 joystick