

Feature

# On Wings of Eagles

A Lock On: Modern Air Combat Mission Report

by **Cat**

Hello, my friends! I am honoured again today by my selection once again to help the Americans prepare themselves for missions in our operating area. Very few of us are so trusted. In addition to the A-10s of Col. Martin, over the last several weeks a detachment of the 27th Fighter Squadron has rotated in-theater and is now under the tactical command of the 586th. This is not a normal procedure for the Americans; they are loath to allow foreign militaries to control U.S. assets in the field. I do not know why, but these seven crews, and eight of the marvelous F-15C Eagles, are now with our Regiment. I have been temporarily detailed to them. I was originally tasked to support this squadron at the beginning of the war, but many other problems intervened. However, I was able to check out in the marvelous F-15C, which is not so very different from the F-16 with which I am familiar. And as luck would have it, one of my Red Flag instructors is the checkout pilot for the 27th Squadron! He is Captain Troy Barker, who for some reason the Americans call "Slapshot." I do not know *why* this is; it is one of the customs of Western air forces to give their pilots strange names to use as call-signs. They paint them on the canopy rails of their fighters. I think this is a morale-booster, but it is odd how often these names come from a mistake or gaffe the pilot made, no? It is your American sense of humour?

***"...it is odd how often  
these names come from  
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We are briefed in my Commander's office, with Major Kelly of the 27th, who is shadowing the Commander, there. Unlike my sojourn with the A-10 squadron, the F-15s are integrated into our own Regiment, and therefore the mission planning is primarily ours, though the Americans are now with us in every step. They are in great case our advisors, a strange role for former enemies, no? But my grandfather, who fought in the Great Patriotic War before he flew the Soldier's Aircraft — the MiG-15-in Korea, would tell you that we should be friends with the Americans. He was saddened by having to fight his former comrades over Korea. And now, we are friends again, with a common enemy.

The Turks have withdrawn from Georgia for now, leaving Muqtadeh without air cover. After the destruction of the supply train at Tkvarcheli and the loss of two more F-16s, the Turkish government fell! They are proceeding with new elections and the Turkish mullahs are in for a fight to retain power. But still, they are committed to their jihad against us; they have joined with Iran in providing Muqtadeh munitions on the sly. For now, this will be all the help he gets! But we have uncontested air superiority, and I am hoping to go to the Su-25 squadron of the Regiment next, or back to the A-10s, to get back into the action.

Today, the plan is familiarizing. Me, with the F-15 again. For Troy, we will show him the IRLF headquarters at Sukhumi airbase. The rumours abound that Muqtadeh is receiving MiG-29 aircraft and air-defense equipment from Saddam Hussein's old stocks, confiscated by the Iranians after the Americans took Iraq. We will do an armed reconnaissance to see if these rumours have any substance.

We each pick our own loadouts for this mission. For me, a mix of two AMRAAM, four of the excellent AIM-7, and two Sidewinders along with a fuel tank. Troy chooses six of the excellent "Slammer," and two Sidewinders along with a fuel tank. We have painted the F-15s with bright candy-cane stripes on their noses and wings, and put the American national insignia in full colour. This is to ensure that our antiaircraft gunners see them clearly, and recognize them as friendly and not Turkish; though the Turks have no Eagles, they are unfamiliar to our people and clearly not of Russian origin.

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We go to see the meteorological officer. For Troy's benefit, we conduct the briefing in English. This is strange for him, our ways are much more informal than he is used to. The Americans generally do not take their weather report over tall glasses of tea! As I always do, I munch on slices of cucumber as I listen.

*"There is not a cloud in the sky, Sacha. Today, a high-pressure area is over the Black Sea west of us. It will be at least 25 degrees at noon, when you fly. However, clear-air turbulence is predicted. One meter per second at sea level, and rising as you gain altitude. Over 8000 meters... about 30,000 feet, for you, Captain, it should be smooth sailing."*

*"What is the visibility, Kolya?"*

*"It will be somewhat hazy. Sixty kilometers... roughly 35 or 40 nautical miles, I think."*

Troy muses at that information.

*"Sidewinders ought to be dead on, then. No problems with IR missile firing, if we get into any bandits. If we have to get in that close, anyway. Don't hose one off vertical, if you can help it. No need to lose one in the sun."*

I took a sip of tea.

*"In the mountains around Sukhumi, ground clutter may make radar locks at anything outside visual range difficult."*

*"At least we know the Turkish air force isn't in the area."*

*"Da. But we do not know if the IRLF has their own air force. We will find out, yes?"*

*"Hell, yeah. If they're dumb enough to stick their heads up, we'll chop 'em right off!"*

The GAZ jeep is waiting for us, its enlisted driver looking bored. We clamber in over the sides and chat quietly as he drives us to the flight line. As Kolya said, the weather is marvelously warm and clear. The F-15s await us at the flight line, their onboard power units whining in the late morning haze. I find mine, AF82-711, and walk around with its crew chief. I have come to know these Americans well over the past weeks and this goes smoothly. They trust me with their airplane. I climb into the cockpit and begin strapping in with her help, then close the canopy and wait for the signal to start engines. It is hot in all this gear! I get the signal and punch the start for the left engine. This enables me to turn on the cool air, at last! The crew chief motions me through the preflight dance and I start my right engine. A snappy salute to the crew chief, and I am off to the runway, with Troy in tow. Today, I am flight lead, Enfield 1-1.



The F-15 is much like my beloved Su-27P. This is no surprise, as the Su-27 was developed specifically as this plane's adversary! Both are incredibly powerful! Even heavily loaded, the Eagle leaps into the air, just as my beautiful Crane would have done! It loves to fly. It is the Americans' national symbol and it has sharp talons. I retract landing gear and proceed to sharpen those very talons.

Unlike the Su-27, the Americans have not fitted datalink capability to these aircraft. They are also not the latest variant in the U.S. inventory. This is probably because they did not wish for us to see the latest and greatest. Regardless, these are dangerous indeed. The APG-63 (V1) radar is older but still potent. I fiddle with it as I swing on course for Sukhumi with Troy nestled in close on my wing-it is different from the Zhuk radars I am used to.

A \*beep\* from the Tactical Electronic Warning System, the TEWS, shakes me out of my reverie.



I look carefully, and see the "06" cue, boxed, in the outer ring.

"06?"

I must have had my mike hot, for Troy responds.

*"Roger that. Mud spike!"*

"06" is the American cue for the 3M9M missile system, the Cube — you call it "SA-6." It is our equivalent to the HAWK and it is lethal. I order a descent to get out of its envelope, but as I do Sukhumi is coming into sight. Overlord calls us. MiGs are scrambling from the base!

I swallow the lump in my throat and command TWS mode on the radar. I have picked up nothing and we are within 25 miles of Sukhumi base. The beeping on my TEWS continues-and the Cube is joined by a Shilka AA gun system.





I warn Troy off, as the TEWS shows the first spike of the MiG-29 radars as they rocket off the concrete.

*"Two, pince left! One, shooter. Music on!"*

*"Two."*

*"Weapons free!"*

*"Two, engaging left."*



I focus on the right MiG, and lock him up in TWS, designating an AMRAAM.

The MiGs are low, hugging the ground, and as I fire, I lose the lock. The AMRAAM has not gone active, even though we are within RTR, and goes wild. I change to auto-vertical and reff into a hard right turn, as Troy's bandit cuts across



my line of vision.



*"Two, change-up!"*

*"Roger. Fox 3."*

I lock on the second bandit, now scissoring left, and bring up a Sidewinder. I have the speed advantage on him and he will not evade me. I am closer than one nautical mile, nearly in guns range, before I fire.



The Sidewinder flies true, detonating just above the MiG and taking it out of the fight.



Meanwhile, the second MiG has turned like a cornered rat, and as Troy fires his last AMRAAM, it fires an R-27.



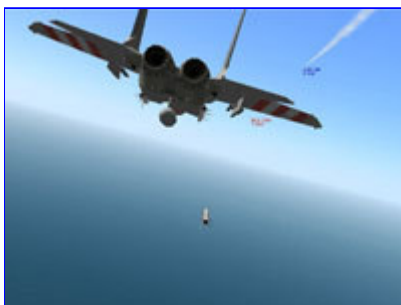
"Two, break left! Missile launch!"

"Two, engaged defensive!"

Again, the AMRAAM had not gone active in time and it flies wild.



The MiG has lost its radar lock, though, in evading the AMRAAM, and his R-27R also flies wild. And he has opened himself up to my attack. I close, and salvo off a Sidewinder...



...followed by a Sparrow.

This is *not* American doctrine, it is *Russian* — I learned it well in Ethiopia. The MiG is agile and one must put more than one missile in the air to be sure of a kill.



The IRLF pilot evades the Sidewinder with a good maneuver and use of flares, but my Sparrow is not so easily defeated. The MiG detonates with a fireball, but my TEWS is singing a lock-on tune. The SAM has locked me.



I go for the water and look to the coast-there should be a missile in flight if the battery is capable of launching.

*"One, engaged defensive SA-6."*

*"I see him, one, he's on the road to the airbase. Uh... they're moving, in convoy. They can't deploy missiles. If we stay out of range of that ZSU we ought to be okay."*



So. The radar crew attempted to distract us with their lock-on. And it nearly worked-if I had not been focused on protecting Troy, I would have opened myself up to the shot. But in focusing on the kill I left myself open to the SAM. It can set up for action quickly.

We must leave the area... *now*.

I call Troy to rejoin and we head for home.



Sukhumi is so close to Sochi. As we line up in the pattern for landing the Cube radar continues to paint us, only losing contact when the mountains intervene. *This is intolerable* — the Cube *must* be broken — as the HAWK was before it.



We land in perfect formation, and I tell the tower to have a jeep meet me at the flight-line.

I must brief the Commander; action must be decisive and swift, for the Cube *now commands* the southern skies.

## 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
- The mission was flown using the LOMAC Gold version

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