

Feature

What Grrlz Are Made Of

A Lock On: Flaming Cliffs Mission Report

by **Cat**

I have a new call-sign!

I have before remarked on the Americans' habit of changing their call-signs so often and that they use them to commemorate embarrassing incidents. This is the American sense of humor. And I appear to have met this tradition head-on! This, I blame on my new wingman.

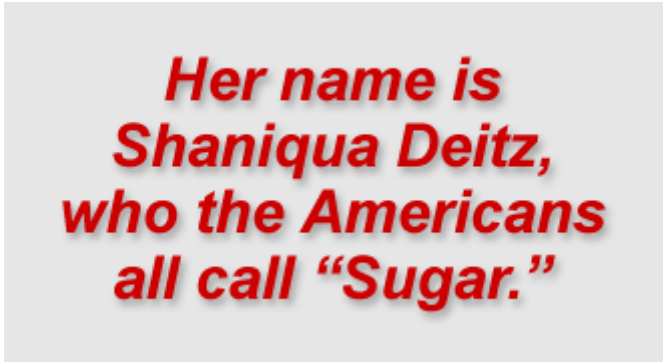
Her name is Shaniqua Deitz, who the Americans all call "Sugar." She is from Birmingham, Alabama. If that raises your eyebrows, that I now have an American's wing, I suppose that is because you do not know that I have taken up my liaison duties to the 27th Fighter Squadron again, for a time. There are few of the "Fighting Eagles" from the Langley Air Force Base here at Sochi with us. Their number has in the past fluctuated between four and seven.

Their primary duty has been the safety of Captain Scarlet, the E-3A that the NATO powers have sent to us to watch the skies. Now, with the Germans here with their F-4 and MiG-29 9-12 aircraft that duty is rotating among the interceptor units here. As the Eagles are now going to be in missions over the Sheikh's fledgling Emirate, I returned to help them.

Their color schemes have changed. Now that the 41st Division's SAM gunners are used to seeing the F-15 and have the Americans programmed into their IFF systems, they have had their candy-stripes taken off and all are back in the strange grey over light grey air camouflage that the Americans favor. My 82-711 that I flew last year is still with them. The Americans still do not totally trust me and of course this aircraft has now had sensitive, highly classified equipment like the Link 16 taken out. Of course, we do know about your Western JTIDS and other wonderful equipment and we have an equivalent in our own aircraft. Fortunately, the Americans I fly with have access to the AWACS' data feed and so this is not a problem. I have been thoroughly drilled by my own air force in working with the air controllers without the aid of such technology, so I will not be seriously handicapped by the JTIDS' absence.

After I re-familiarized myself with your wonderful American Eagle aircraft, I began to fly missions with Shaniqua over the Emirate. We will maintain air superiority. We have not seen more of the Mirage aircraft, but Iran and Syria continue to smuggle in MiG fighters to the IRLF force at Suhumi and this is a problem. I am continually amazed that the Georgians cannot stop the enemy aircraft from getting here! To get to Abkhazia, surely they have to fly over Georgia. We do have a tense relationship with the Georgians, though; they fear our influence in this region nearly as much as they fear the Sheikh.

Today, the mission is a new one for me! I have not flown dedicated combat air patrol in quite some time. Our mission in the 586th has been close-air support and precision strikes on ground targets for the most part. The Eagles have a briefing room set up in their building here at the Sochi-Adler international airport. It has a screen on the wall for Power Point presentations and rows of desks, like those we had in school. They do mission briefings



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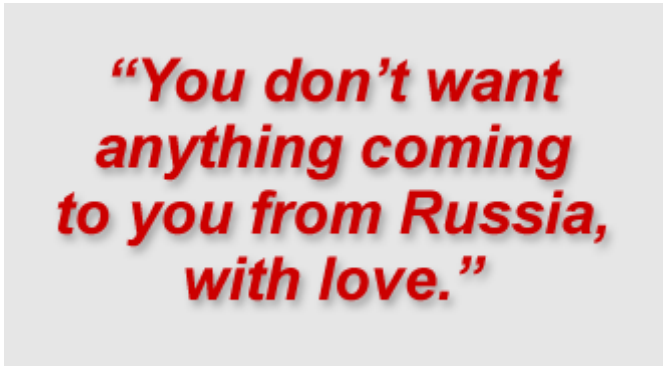
here. My own Commander usually attends, though for the present I report to Major Curtis, who is the 27th Squadron's detachment commander.

For this flight, we had two of the Hornet pilots from 433 Squadron with us and some of the higher leaders in the coalition force. Among them is a new friend, Lt. Commander Mark Mitchell of the American Navy. Mark works with the headquarters staff as a tactical officer and liaison for the U.S. Navy forces in our region and is on loan from the "Valions," one of the Navy Hornet squadrons. Do you know that I correspond with a U.S. Naval aviator? He is with the VFA-103, fighting in Iran even now and commands a squadron of your new Super Hornets. Mark knows him and both of them are most interested in how 433 Squadron employs its Hornets here. Mark had a most smug expression on his face as we gathered and when I asked him about it he almost broke into laughter! When I asked him what was funny, he could only look over my shoulder at the Canadian pilots getting cups of coffee and shake his head.

"You'll see."

A general officer of the staff entered and someone called us all to strict attention. This would be our briefer for this mission. He gave us leave to be seated and the lights dimmed as he started paging through the Power Point. This apparently was a much anticipated mission!

"Okay. You all know that we got run out of the Gudauta airbase last month by IRLF rocket artillery. We've been looking for some payback ever since and now, our Canadian partners are going to be the ones to deliver the mail."



"You don't want anything coming to you from Russia, with love."

A change of slide, to a photo of the BM-21 "Grad," a truck carrying a multiple rocket launcher.

"This is your target. A platoon of BM-21 122mm launcher vehicles. They're set up in a tree line, couple clicks south of the Gumista river. The coordinates of this site are in your brief. Simple mission: Search and destroy."

The next slide showed an overhead view of the target site.

"You'll ingress from the north, at low altitude. Be on the lookout for MANPADS in the area. The IRLF are known to carry the SA-16 man-portable missile system. You don't want anything coming to you from Russia, with love."

That provoked a tense chuckle from this captive audience and the general winced, then looked at me.

"No offense, Captain Andreeva."

"I take none, sir!"

"Okay. 433 Squadron will be covered by F-15 Charlies from the 27th, Andreeva and Deitz, right?"

Major Curtis nodded and the briefing continued.

"You two need to be on your toes for bandits out of Suhumi. Intel has it that more MiGs are there, Syrian again and Iranian. They'll be inside 25 nautical miles of you at wheels-up if they scramble, so you won't be BVR long if that happens. Make the most of what you've got — the far better aircraft and missiles. God knows how they're managing to split their air force like this with the hell the Navy's giving them down in Iran right now."

“Hooooo-AH, sir!”

That brought a smile to the general’s shadowed face.

“Indeed so, Commander Mitchell. All right, people. You’re burning daylight.”

It was time for the walk-around. My F-15 is loaded out with an extra fuel tank, two of the AIM-120 “AMRAAM” missiles, two Sparrows and four of the Sidewinder-M. I carefully walk all around him and pull on them to make sure all is tightly secured to the airframe. This Eagle is even older than my very own Su-27S, which was built in late 1987 in the 18th batch. But it is rather more advanced in many ways.



The American aircrew assists me in strapping into the tight-fitting cockpit. By this time, they have become used to a Russian flying their prized airplane! Unlike Lt. Kulikov, here the plane captain is a young enlisted man, what the Americans call a “senior airman.” He is very professional and very nice and very knowledgeable for one so young, not long out of secondary school. I am continually amazed at the professionalism and initiative of the American enlisted ranks. I believe this comes from your all-volunteer force.

I start the engines one after another and taxi out to follow Sugar to the runway. As I taxi out, I pass two of 433 Squadron’s Hornets completing their preflight checks and I see now what it was that Mark Mitchell found so funny: the Canadian aircraft are carrying external fuel tanks and on each of them in bold black paint is the word “Valions”. A good joke, but one I am sure the Canadians do not see the humor in!

On the runway I take the nominal lead and throttle up, feeling the General Electric engines’ power beneath me. The bird yearns for the sky, his natural element!



At last we’re clear to take off! I select military power and the Eagle darts toward the end of the runway. In my mirrors, Sugar lifts off first.

“Y’all stuck to that runway down there, girlfriend? C’mom, punch it and let’s get at them terrorist mo-fos!”

Smoothly, I rotate 711’s nose up. In our air force, we are trained to save reheat for times of greater need; we do not use it for takeoff. The Americans, on the other hand, routinely use reheat for takeoff. I believe that this is in part because of the Americans’ great proficiency in air refueling. Unlike them, most of our front line aircraft have no provision for refueling. This is being corrected in later models of the Su-27 and Su-30 and of course, the Su-33. I have refueled in the air only a few times. It is one of the things that we are working on together; even the way the U.S. Air Force does this is different from ours. Like the American Navy, we use a probe and basket, rather than the flying boom the American air force prefers. It is most tricky to master. I am not proficient-yet. I will have to become proficient, however. I am told that we may be flying far to the south, soon, over Georgia and Armenia, to help the American Navy in its fight against the Iranians! To take the fight to Iran, that would be something.



We check in with Captain Scarlet as Colt 1, a flight of two and are cleared to 15,000 feet as I clear my mind and remember to think in feet rather than meters. It can be confusing. On my radar sweep, I see jamming strobes to the right of the scan pattern, a beep from the Tactical Electronic Warfare System, the TEWS, signifies the presence of the E-3 aircraft.

"That you down there, Sugar?"

The voice is not a controller, it is from another F-15, on our squadron common frequency. One of the E-3's escorts, which is operating its onboard ECM.

"Roger that. We's in the game today."

"Rog. Get one for us, lucky girl. We're still drilling holes in the sky up here."



We swing south with me in the lead, clearing the path for the F/A-18s following us, behind and below our altitude.

"Colt 1, fence check."

Into Abkhazia, over the 41st Division staff at Gantiadi. Gudauta is five minutes south, so close. We cross over Gudauta airbase and with the Gumista river in sight Sugar and I begin to curve a lazy circle that will enable us to cover the Canadian flight. Suddenly, we hear a new, deep bass voice, over the GUARD distress frequency!

"Now, Yankee pigs, we will see what you are made of! Allahu Akbar! Death to Western infidels!"

"What the hell was that?"

Sugar sounded more exasperated than apprehensive.



"I am certain that it is the cursed mujahids, trying to frighten us."

"Oh, yeah?" Sugar came up on GUARD herself. "Yo' mama didn't teach you what lil' grrrlz 'r made of? Lemme 'splain it to ya. We're made of sugar and spice and everything nice!"

"Colt 1, Captain Scarlet-cut the chatter!" One of the AWACS controllers, excited. "Snap 195! Bandit bandit, flight of two, bullseye 095, range 29 nautical miles, low, hot."

"I-i-i-i-i-i-t's showtime!"

Sugar sounded excited too.

"You have the lead."

"Roger."

I smacked down my tinted visor and pushed the comm. switch for the E-3.

"Colt 1, request clearance to target."

"Colt 1 cleared hot."

"Roger. Colt 12, master arm on. Weapons free. Start the music."

"Two."

I set the Westinghouse APG-63 radar's dedicated display to 20 nautical miles and select TWS mode. Using the F-15's excellent hands-on stick and throttle, I narrow the azimuth scan for faster target updating and thumb the radar beam down to cover a volume of sky from ground to approximately 15,000 feet.

"One, what's your status?"

"I see them now."

My TEWS is chirping enemy search radar, identified as the RP-29 radar of two MiG-29s. It is as the general suspected.



“Go high to take the leader. Chainsaw! One, shooter.”

I can hear the Hornets as Sugar and I set up on the incoming MiGs. They are starting their target runs!

“Enfield 11, rifle!”

The Hornets are launching AGM-65 Mavericks at the three Grad launchers!

“Colt 1, watch our backs. We’re inbound to target.”

“Roger. Colt 11 engaging bandits.”

I designate both targets. I will release both my AIM-120s on this pass and thereby force them defensive. Our ECM is preventing a target lock but knowing the MiGs have lock-on-jam capability, we must fire and deny them the shot with an R-27!

“Fox three. Two in the air.”





"Roger. Fox one." Sugar has fired a Sparrow.

The lead Hornet's Maverick is on target, as are the two fired by his wingman.

The Canadians are in the process of a bomb-damage assessment over the mujahid compound, a dangerous task, as it is shrouded in woods and an air battle is happening only a couple of miles south of them! I am well inside RTR now and my AIM-120 missiles are active as they come off the pylons. I switch to single-target track mode on the wingman and see him immediately change course.



"Both missed on the leader! Fox two, dammit, guns, guns from two!"

The lead MiG-29 is savagely maneuvering!

He forced both the inbound AMRAAM and the inbound Sparrow to overshoot him. Sugar fires a Sidewinder, but the MiG pops flares and rolls inverted, pulling across the missile and forcing it too to miss by mere feet.

In so doing, though, the MiG lead pilot has placed himself in Sugar's gunsight. The Vulcan cannon in her right wing root buzzes angrily and a swarm of phosphorous tracers reach for the MiG, a Syrian from the same squadron as the MiG I stole last year, ripping through one of the horizontal stabilizers!



The second MiG is Iranian, as I found out later. It has defeated my Slammer with a violent maneuver, pitching down and then up at the last second and forcing the missile to miss low as it tried to match his angle. He pulls through and commits a fatal error, I can see the light of his afterburners.

I have a Sidewinder selected, screaming in my headphones for me to release it. Instead, I maintain STT lock and

fire a Sparrow. So close and with the Iranian's energy depleted, he has no hope of evasion.

"Two, fox two!" Sugar is still engaged with the Syrian, a dogged fighter.

As he explodes, I pull into the vertical, with full reheat selected. Coming over the top, I am in vertical scan dogfight mode and still inverted as the APG-63 locks the Syrian fighter in STT, two miles away and crossing me at an oblique angle.





"Two, back off! I have him-fox one!"

I do not want to risk a heat-seeking Sidewinder locking onto Sugar, who is also downrange, looping in for a head-on pass!

"Oh, hell no, girlfriend! I'm closer! Guns, guns from two!"

Again, yellow tracer envelops the enemy fighter, bringing fire and doom for the Syrian pilot. I see him eject as the MiG drops off my radar.

"Pitbull! Two, watch out!"

"It's cool. That Sparrow'll go dumb now, less'n y'all're FLOODing me!"

To be sure, I "freeze" the radar, ending all emissions so that the Sparrow will self-destruct.

"Colt 1, picture."

"Hallo, Destiny Angel! Picture is clear. Well done!"

It is the British controller, who I know from previous missions.

"Destiny Angel?!" This from one of the F-15 escorts, coming up on our squadron common channel. "NOT! More like Spice! As in 'Sugar and Spice and everything nice!' You baaaad girl, Sugar!"

"All right, can it."



The squadron exec was flying on the escort mission for Captain Scarlet today.

“Good work, Sugar ‘n Spice! Now herd those Canucks back home, pronto!”

“Colt 12, join.”

“Roger that.”

I can see the orbiting Hornets now, coming in to check target damage. Sugar’s eyes are sharper, however and she snaps a warning to the Canadians.

“Enfield 1, Colt 12! Break left NOW! SAM launch!”

Two enemy missiles leap up from the ground at the Hornets, as they immediately maneuver hard to the left and up! I swallow and curse inwardly — this Eagle has no air-to-ground facility.

“We can strafe the cursed mujahid with cannon....”

“Veto!” Sugar was definite and continued, *“It’d feel good to get our butts in a sling. Those guys can defend themselves just fine and I wanna be eating real food and not field rations in a hole someplace hiding from your pals down there tonight.”*

“Yes....”

She is right. The Eagle is an interceptor, not an attack fighter.

It is time to return home.

We follow the Canadians in and are cleared first onto the field. It is an uneventful flight back to Sochi and it is good as always to see our home again. And I will have much to explain to my 586th comrades, with my new call-sign. I am sure that Vasily, Alexei, and Dmitri will have much to say about *that*.





There is a letter waiting for me when I return to my quarters.

This is strange, it has no return address. Tearing open the envelope, I look at the handwriting-it is precise, and clearly written in English. My heart stops when I read the salutation. Only one man has ever addressed me thus:

Hello, Lieutenant A.D. Andreeva,

Or is it that I forget myself? When you left, you gave me leave to call you "Sacha," as your friends do, and apologized for calling my people dogs. Do you remember? You told me then that you owe me your life, and I now must ask you to trust me once again, for that debt has come due. I tell you this so that you will know from whom you receive this letter. I must speak with you once again. It is of the greatest urgency.

We know that you fly now with the American "Fighting Eagles." Your new American aircraft is as well known to us as your old MiG-29 with the hammer and sickle once was, Sacha. In ten days' time, you must fly your F-15C, tail code FF / 82-711 to the Georgian airbase at Batumi. Further instructions will await you there when you arrive and park the aircraft at the general cargo terminal. Do not fail me, Sacha. I trust none save you with what I must relate. Come alone. Today, the Imam received a new pet from his friends in the south, a super bug with a face like a skull, swatted from the sky. Do you remember how I found you? Consider that day when you decide what you must do, my beautiful Russian friend.

It is unsigned. But I know its author. A swarthy man, a tall man, a Turk with a thick, dark mustache and glittering, dark eyes. Kemal Volkan, of the Turkish intelligence service. My savior when I was captured, after the IRLF shot me down over Suhumi airbase last year. Kemal lives! I do owe this valiant Turk my life. There can be no doubt that it is him, these details together cannot come from another. But what can he mean, what can this "super bug" be? A new weapon? A bio-weapon, perhaps? I was in hospital when he found me. I crumple the paper in my hand and run for the door.

I must see Major Curtis.... and quickly!

System Specs

- AMD Athlon 3000+ processor
- MachSpeed N2PAP-Lite motherboard with onboard Aureal AC97 sound
- PNY Technologies Verto GeForce FX 5950 Ultra / NVIDIA v66.93 drivers
- 1GB Kingston PC2700 DDR DRAM
- Creative 12x CD-ROM
- Maxtor 40GB main drive
- DirectX Version 9.0c
- Windows XP Home with SP2