

Part 1: Preview

A Tank T-72: Balkans in Fire Mission Report

The Chapel of Hate

by **Cat**

Dear Shoura,

I hope this letter finds you well and happy. Grandmama has written me, and she tells me you have been naughty and got yourself chair bound again, haha! This does not surprise me to hear, but I bet Papa was. You are after all supposed to set a better example, being the older child, yes? Just kidding. I have only just heard of your capture by the mujahids, and your dramatic escape, sister, and believe me we were all beside ourselves here. In seriousness, Alexandra my sister, you should be more careful. Papa and Mama would be devastated if anything seriously bad happened to you. As Vasily says, you are impetuous! Even Vadim looked concerned when I read Grandmama's letter, and that is something. By the way, Grandmama said in her last letter that Uncle Grigoriy is coming to Sochi! Won't that be something?

I hear that you have a new friend. Grandmama tells me about this pilot, Alexei. What do we know of him? Does he treat you well? If he does not, I will know the reason why, after all. I bet Vasily is so jealous! He *is* in love with you, you know. As Pavel was when we were all in Komsomol together, back before everything went to hell.

Speaking of Pavel Andreyevich, he sends to you his love. We are still stuck out here in this Godforsaken wasteland that is Yugoslavia, after all, and he needs something to cheer him. Vadim, our driver — he is as closed mouth as always. I believe that riding with two fresh-baked (Vadim would say half-baked!) lieutenants has him on his Ps and Qs too. Or not. This is life in the second company, second battalion, of the 210th Guards Tanks, after all. We, the Port Arturskiy Regiment, winners of the Order of Alexander Nevskiy and Bogdan Khmel'nitskiy! We are imposing... at least in our own minds. But to our friends the Serbs, and their enemies the Bosnians, and the Muslims (who hate us all), and the Albanians too, they are not so impressed.

We are about fed-up with this “peacekeeping” nonsense, Shoura. Especially what with the war in Georgia picking up. We all wish to come home and defend the Rodina against your Sheikh. And this may be possible. I am told that the 210th's deployed companies may be called home to fill out the Regiment in Georgia. One hopes for the best. I am sick of trying to keep all these former Yugoslavs from killing one another.

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nonsense, Shoura."***

We do not have an IRLF here, but we do have a KLA, the Kosovar Liberation Army, and that is just as bad. Recently, we were sent to northern Kosovo to try to keep the Serbs and the Albanian Kosovars from each other's throats. The Albanians trust the Americans and the NATO units, and it is thought that the Serbs would trust us, and all would be quiet and peaceful. And we were all wrong, as usual. It is not open war here, usually. But the KLA is bent on separatism and killing Serbs, and our friendly Serbs are all for that idea only in reverse, and we have all sworn to prevent that, after all. It was the KLA's turn, I suppose, to throw a monkey-wrench into the latest U.N. attempt at peace. And where they got the armored vehicles, I have no idea... but they have them. This is where my story starts. You are not the only one to see action! We got some action this week.

It all started, Shoura, when the KFOR intelligence pukes (that is an American term — we have been hanging around Camp Bondsteel way too much) got some “hot dope” that the KLA was about to start something. We even knew what sector they would be in, and we staked out an area near an Orthodox church that was destroyed in the last war, the one

in the late '90s. It still is, after all. *Nothing* ever gets fixed in this place. They're too busy fighting. Well, that is not totally fair. But the building... it is still a shambles. It is strategically placed about 1100 meters from a ridgeline to the southwest, and our section of the 2/2 210th was hidden over the ridge. To our far right, about a thousand meters away, a section of two German Leopard 1A4 tanks. I am amazed that they still deploy those old tanks. They have the new 2A4 Leopards, after all. Can you believe we work hand in glove with German peacekeepers? Grandmama must be scandalized. Together, we took the church under observation.



Our section leader decided to send only one of us forward, and to keep the motor-infantry platoon and two of our T-72B tanks back over the ridgeline. We were to “recon” the area and retreat if we got into heavy contact that we could not handle. If needs must, our brothers would back us up, and together the three of us are a match for most enemy tanks! So, I gave the order to Vadim, forward!

“Yes, we go forward, alone. Again.” Vadim swore into the interphone. *“Why did I join the Army, eh?”*

“Ho, Vadim Filipovich!”

As usual, Pavel, stretched out to my left behind his scopes in the cramped, low-slung turret of our steel monster, was too cheerful for an early morning under the gun.

“What would you be doing if not for this wonderful Army, eh? Strutting your stuff on the beach, perhaps? Beckoning to the lovely girls in their bikinis? No, no. They would be scared away by your ugly mug!”



A snort from Vadim at that.

We jounced and bounced over the meadow, clouds scudding the skies above, casting random shadows on the grass as it blew in the wind. Vadim deftly sailed the T-72 over the meadow, and I took care not to get my arm caught in the automatic loader as Pavel's baby, the Rapira-3 2A46M / D-81TM 125mm cannon, adjusted itself to maintain its angle regardless of the ups and downs of our movement. We were expecting trouble. I had ordered the travel locks

disengaged, and Pavel to activate the fire-control system. This way, we would only have to select ammunition, and load the weapon without waiting for the stabilizer to catch and spin up. It takes precious time to do that.

I caught smoke to the far left. We cannot talk to the Germans — our fearless leaders have not thought to give us radios that can speak to one another. One has to be careful too, because there is no IFF like you have in the air and you might nail a friend if your head is not in the game at all times. The smoke was in the direction of the Leopards, and as we neared the top of the ridge I saw a missile smoke trail arc over the sky. The KLA has got hold of antitank missiles, probably mounted on a vehicle of some kind.



“Vadim, stop! Pavel, scan, azimuth 45.”

Vadim’s eyes are sharp. *“Sir! APC on the ridge ahead!”*

I locked my 1K-13 scope on it and flipped the switch to center the gun. *“Track, one eight hundred meters! Load HE-T! Weapon free!”*

“Identified!” Pavel zoomed his sight in close. *“Hull down, two hundred meters from the landmark!”*

Our tank jolted as Pavel pressed the triggers, and the gun snapped immediately to 45 degrees, the loading position. I

surveyed the target.

A smoke trail, inbound to us! Another missile!

"He's still alive!"



The radio-guided missile impacted the ridgeline directly in front of us, showering the tank with dirt and smoke, obscuring our sights. Suddenly, I saw movement to the left.

"Pavel, forget him, traverse left! Target, tank! Load sabot! Fire when ready!"

An enemy T-72, the mirror image of our own tank! It was by far more dangerous than the antitank missiles for now. The enemy tank was moving fast. Pavel activated his TPD-1KM laser rangefinder, and smoothly pivoted the turret right, keeping in mind that you have to lase twice in five seconds for the system to compute lead. Just like your toy airplanes, Shoura, we have lead computed automatically! Firing, the enemy tank lit up with an explosion from the sabot round. We swiveled back to the MT-LB with the 9K113 missile launcher, the "Shturm-S."

"Target, track! Load missile!"

I was tired of fooling around, sister. We would do for this upstart Albanian once and for all. We carry the "Svir," the 9K120 missile system, what our NATO friends know as AT-11 "Sniper." It is most deadly. We have three aboard, generally, and we usually save them for helicopters. We have APFSDS-T sabot rounds, the BM-32, for most tanks. We also carry HEAT-MP rounds, the BK-29M, for troublesome smaller tanks and tracks-can you believe that these people use T-34/85 tanks as well as T-55A tanks, and antediluvian Super Shermans? We carry HE-T rounds, the OF-26, for tracks and lighter vehicles, and for use against fixed positions.





The Svir is simple to use. You do not even have to use the rangefinder. It is off, at any rate, because the missile uses it for guidance. You remember your training on the Vikhr, back when you were learning the Su-25T? It is the same. We put the sight on target and leave it there for the duration of the flight. You can watch it fly in, by its smoke trail! The Shturm-S's explosion was most gratifying.



What I was not prepared for was the next missile, inbound. I saw the smoke trail in the air coming at us and then the explosion rocked our tank. A hit! Just behind the turret! *“What the devil! Everyone report!”*

“Driver, okay!”

“Gunner, okay!”

“Vadim, what damage?”

“None I can tell. It must have creased our hull alone! We were fortunate. I cannot see through the smoke. Is an RPG man hiding near that burnt out T-72? Seventeen hundred meters would be too far for a hand held launcher, though.”



“Sergei!” Pavel was excited. *“Another T-72! Right behind the first!”*

So, that was the source! We are not the only ones on the battlefield with the Svir system, after all. We would give him a dose of his own medicine. *“Target, tank! Load missile!”*

I watched our missile plow into the enemy.

To the far right, near the burning vehicle, though, our work was not done. There, another MT-LB, one without missiles. A machine gun, spraying the German infantry! Well, this would be one for the books—a Russian tank would ride to the rescue. I cued Pavel to the target, and as we fired, explosions around the enemy track—our commander’s tank also firing, from nearly 2,000 meters away from him! As the smoke cleared, we could see the KLA infantry running away.



I began to relax. This is a mistake, Shoura. One never should relax on the battlefield. Our tank suddenly rocked again, a hit nearby! *Where is it coming from?*

Urgently, I take command of the turret from Pavel and slew hard left. In my sights, trouble, close! A thousand meters away, a tank-destroyer! They snuck up on us, the wily devils! A second, to the right of it! We are bracketed! I call to Pavel to load sabot, quickly!

At this distance, even the tough frontal armor of the SU-100 cannot be proof against the BM-32 sabot round. It punches through the glacis instantly, and the tank destroyer is enveloped in flames. I watch the hatches pop open, the tank crew climbing out, human torches. I swallow, hard. I do not even like to see the enemy die like that.

"Poor bastards." Pavel is somber. But there is another SU-100, looking for revenge. His shot is long, striking behind us. Ours is not, and hits him clean. A final kill.



We do what we must. But in the army, death is personal and it is always near. And on each end of the Rapira, we are the same, after all. The Americans have a saying: It is well that war is so horrible, else we would become too fond of it. I hope to never become fond of it. Soon, I hope to be back in the Rodina, with my brother tankers, and with my family near. If I must do this, I prefer it to be in defense of my home and not trying to keep those bent on killing one another apart.

Take care, and I will see you soon.

Love, your little brother, Sergei

Part 2 of Cat's **Tank T-72: Balkans in Fire** Preview
will introduce you to this new gem from Russia.

System Specs

- AMD Athlon 3000+ processor
- MachSpeed N2PAP-Lite motherboard with onboard Aureal AC97 sound
- PNY Technologies Verto GeForce FX 5950 Ultra
- 1GB Kingston PC2700 DDR DRAM
- Creative 12x CD-ROM
- Maxtor 40GB main drive
- DirectX Version 9.0a
- Windows 2000 with SP4

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