

The Voice of the Prophet

A Lock On: Modern Air Combat Mission Report

by **Cat**

Many things have changed since last we spoke, my friends. For one, I am at last back in my Commander's good graces... at least for the most part. Our war against the IRLF continues, however, the Turk is no longer so prominent in it. As I told you before, their mullahs have fallen on hard times, not the least of which was their disaster at the Samelalio nuclear facility.

***"I am at last back
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The Turkish public has no stomach for this war, and has prevailed upon their government to get out of it before their relations with America and Europe are irreparably damaged. So the only Turkish troops in evidence now are their advisors, who are here in secret. Iran is taking over their war for them, for the Iranians care nothing for world opinion and they are covetous toward this part of Georgia.

Suhumi base is still in ruins and the reconstruction proceeds slowly. This has not given us a respite, however, for their mujahideen have chosen this time to begin infiltrating in other parts of the fertile coastal plain. Of particular concern to our government, and to the Americans our allies is the oil facilities along the coast. Further still, this is the regional breadbasket. Many things are grown here, far from the eyes in Tbilisi. And now Gudauta city has found itself on the front lines of the war. The Canadians and Georgian attack squadron there are being harassed daily with IRLF mortars and snipers. For the past week, the base has been shut down, and we can only use it as a divert airfield. This is an intolerable setback. Something must be done, unfortunately, the IRLF is like smoke. It fades away as you swipe at it. You cannot fight smoke. We must look to their supplies, and this next mission found us doing just that. But it did not begin so.

When Vasily came to collect me in the GAZ jeep, I was watching the aircraft come and go. It was a warm summer morning, the sun not too hot yet, and the ramp was bustling. Sochi-Adler airbase is a busy place now, with the Regiment here, our sister regiment, the 503d, and of course the Americans, the British Tornados, and the greatest surprise yet: a squadron of German F-4 Phantoms! We are becoming quite the international melting-pot here at Sochi.

I wished to see Alexei Karmarov off on another of his secret missions. These are really secret to no one, because one cannot hide an Su-33. And two of them on Sochi's main runway are harder still to hide, not to mention an entire Regiment of them parked ominously on the ramp near our own brightly colored MiGs in their disruptive camouflage. Theirs are amazing, though, for their odd grayscale coloring and the presence of Western weapons! But we do not know why he comes and goes, or who he strikes.

***"I wished to see
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secret missions."***

On at least one occasion, Vasily and the Commander were recently tasked with a fighter-air sweep that I am sure was intended to cover Alexei and his comrades — Vasily was for some reason most vexed about it — but when one is the permanent duty officer she does not know all the facts.

I watched the two gray Sukhoi taxi to the end of Runway 22, ready to fly, and waved to Alexei as he firewalled the throttles and spun the AL-31 engines to their maximum thrust. I miss flying! Only yesterday did the Doctor finally clear me for combat missions again and I hope our Commander will relent and let me fly! As Alexei thundered down the tarmac, executing a showy, afterburner takeoff for me to see, the GAZ jeep pulled up, its horn beeping. Vasily called to me from the driver's seat.

"Sacha, your peacock can spread his tail feathers for you some other time! We are wanted in the Operations Room! Come quickly!"

A mission, perhaps? I ran to the jeep and hopped in as Vasily impatiently gunned the motor. Breathlessly, I questioned him.

"Yes, yes, all in good time!"

Vasily's eyes twinkled. An opportunity to tease me like this, he cannot pass up.

"You have been an idler far too long, Sacha. As you will see, the Rodina still has need of our skills together! I am sure we will kill mujahids today, I saw it in the Commander's eye when he told me to come find you."

I am most definitely not dressed to visit the Commander! I was off duty, and am in civilian attire! Vasily, however, laughs. It seems that we will have time to change — *just*. And we are wanted in flight gear! So, it is to be a mission after all!

At the squadron dormitory, I hurriedly don my green flight coveralls, and grab the bag with my white helmet, and my G-suit and maps. I have not flown since the Samelalio attack and I will be rusty. I wonder what the Commander has planned. In the Operations Room, the Commander is poring over a map of the southern coastal plain. He casts an approving eye over Vasily and I.

"So, my young falcons. You are ready to fly. Alexandra Dimitrievna, I trust you have learned my lesson to you well?"

***"Alexandra Dimitrievna,
I trust you have learned
my lesson to you well?"***

And now, I ask you as I did before, has the Surgeon cleared you for combat missions?"

"Ye-yes, sir. I can fly now."

"Excellent! I cannot have you grounded any longer. I have what the Americans call the 'milk-run' to get you back in shape."

He smiled and handed Vasily and I a sheaf of photographs.

"A radio station?" Vasily sounded confused.

"Da. What you see is the central radio broadcasting facility for this part of the country. In Soviet times, it was part of the state network. Now, things have changed. And the Georgians have allowed Muqtadeh to take it from them."

His face darkened.

"And they murdered the staff as well. Hanged them, publicly, in central Gudauta city before the Georgians could mobilize a response."

I marveled at this information. "But we have an airbase there! Have our allies so little control in their city?"

"One wonders..." The Commander's voice was sour.

"But that is not the strangest thing, my young falcons. We have been contacted, through the Georgian defense minister, by the Mufti of Suhumi. He is the eldest, the most senior of the Muslim clerics in the south. When Muqtadeh took the radio station, he renamed it 'the Voice of the Prophet.' He now broadcasts the vilest propaganda, calling for Jihad against not only us, but against the moderate clerics of the region as well, for not being 'pure' enough. The Mufti wishes this voice silenced! And we will help, if only to gain a Muslim ally in this war."

***"Our orders were simple
and to the point:
Destroy
the radio facility."***

Our orders were simple and to the point: Destroy the radio facility. Future broadcasting would be done either from the airbase itself, or from a reconstructed facility not under IRLF control. By bombing the place, we kill the IRLF technicians and broadcasters that operate it, and deal another setback to the Sheikh's plans.

But that was not all. We also found that the IRLF planned to garrison the radio station and turn it into a headquarters for the area. To this end, weapons and anti-aircraft supplies are being trucked in by the IRLF's Suhumi Battalion. If we see the convoy, we are ordered to attack and sow confusion so that the Georgian paramilitary police may finish them.

Vasily and I considered our options carefully. The radio station is located in the heart of the city, actually in sight of the airbase! We must bomb *carefully*. A missed strike will kill innocents. But at the same time, we must create havoc among the IRLF.

I choose two FAB-500 bombs and two RBK-500AO cluster weapons. The cluster weapons have only twelve bomblets

each and their spread can be confined to a small area. But the FAB bombs will have to be carefully targeted, for the shrapnel and shock wave will injure civilians.

Now it is my turn to taxi to the runway and fly! The RD-33 turbofans are whistling happily behind my head as the tower clears us to line up.

Of course, there is no one to see me off, as Alexei is off on his own mission. This is not lost on Vasily, who cannot resist poking me. He is certain *something* is going on between Alexei and I, however we are but friends — for now. One wonders if Vasily is jealous! I mention this, slyly, as we wait for the tower. Vasily snorts, derisively.

And now, the runway is ours! I push the throttle to full military power and am pressed back into my seat as the engines' whine crescendos.



My MiG-29 9-13, 11-Red, has been grounded as long as I and Lt. Kulikov has him in peak condition! Both of us are anxious to spread our wings once again, and we leap into the sky, at last sundering the bonds that have held me to that desk for so long. It is good to not have the duty for a change!



We turn south as I pull up the landing gear and set our course for the Gudauta airbase. It will provide me with a bombing landmark.

I will press the attack on the radio station while Vasily covers me.



As we near the base...



...my SPO-15 'Beryoza' radar warning unit beeps and I look to see what it has picked up.

As I do, I hear Vasily's voice in my headset.



"012, mud spike 12 o' clock."

"I see it. A short-range system. Either a ZSU, a Tunguska, God forbid, or an Osa, if the intelligence can be believed."



"Only one spike, lead."

"Da. But that does not mean the Sheikh does not have others waiting. Weapons free, two. Terminate the contact."

"Roger."



Vasily and I separate...



...and I edge out to sea to the turning point near the airbase.

I begin my run on the station. I can just see its tall AM antenna now, the tallest structure in the city.



"Target locked..."



"...missile away!"



Vasily has launched a Kh-25MP on the radar.



"Lead, it is a ZSU-23/4 mobile gun. It is covering a convoy to the east, on the highway."



I have lined up on the radio station now.

I enter the Bombing mode and place the reticle on the transmitter building, engaging Aeronautical submode with a squeeze of the trigger.

The tone sounds in my headset; the system is counting down the time before release.



Out of the corner of my eye, a bright flash and the SPO goes dead other than for Vasily's airborne radar. We are alone in the sky.

"One, break! Missile launch!"

A MANPAD missile! An Iгла! The mujahids have Iglas at the radio station!



I pop combined APP-50 chaff-flare units and terminate the attack, noticing as I pull away that I had the wrong bombs selected anyway...

RBK cluster bombs were the wrong ones for the job!

"Vasily, can you see the launcher?"

"Da. Seaward of the building. Recommend you approach from the east, Sacha. He will not be able to see you."

"Two, see if you can distract him while I position."

I crank into a tight turn, noticing as I do what looks like a military convoy on the Suhumi highway.

I radio it to Vasily, who looks through his binoculars and confirms — it was the source of the radar contact.



I line up on the radio tower again taking care to select the FAB bombs this time, and approach carefully, at speed.

Again, I choose the Aeronautical sub-mode. This allows the pilot to set a drop location, and the bombs will fall when the aircraft is in position.



Again the tone sounds, and cuts as the bombs thump loose.



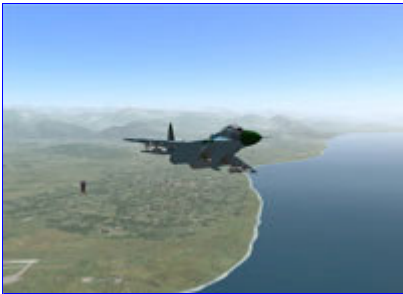
As my bombs begin their flight, I am tense. The mujahid is there, somewhere, waiting. His Igla antiaircraft missile is shoulder-launched and deadly to low-flying aircraft. With it in the hands of Muqtadeh's despised IRLF, any ground attack below three thousand meters is dangerous in the extreme. One must keep her speed high and her wits about her to survive.



I follow through carefully to ensure that the aerodynamic FAB bombs fly true. In Aeronautical mode, one does not have release permission yet, when she first engages the system. Rather, one has designated where she wants to strike, and holds the trigger down. When the tone begins, you are on the bomb run and must not deviate. When the tone stops, the bombs come free.



The trick is not to be caught in what Col. Andy Bush, the A-10 instructor with the Americans, calls the "frag pattern." If one flies too low, one will die with her target! I nearly did this with PB-250 bombs some months ago. Were it not for their parachute-brake, my story would not have ended so happily that day! I remember my mistake well.



So, immediately I execute a hard break turn and pop APP-50 canisters against the missile that is sure to come.

Incredibly, the mujahid does not fire! He must be tracking Vasily, who is pirouetting over the airbase, just out of reach!

The fragmentation bombs fly true...



...and I see the tower fall as the transmitter building disappears in the explosion.



But that is not all. I have bombs left, and there is a convoy of munitions.

Rolling out of the evasive maneuver, I position myself along the highway's axis.

This must be carefully placed, for there are civilian buildings all around and cluster weapons are indiscriminate.



I designate carefully into Aeronautical mode, targeting the road at its widest point...



...and feel the bombs thump free.



I follow through to ensure their straight flight path, and pull up hard when I am sure the RBK-500AO bombs are on their way.



A BTR leads the convoy, and its bright phosphorous 14.5mm tracer flashes by my Red-11 as I select full power and punch through the sound barrier.

A lot of shopkeepers down there will not be pleased with me, I fear!



The canister bombs detonate...



...spewing death over the area...



...and killing two trucks loaded with munitions.

The Georgian police are in position to begin their attack!

We can do no more here. Closely engaged, we cannot support the Georgians on the ground and I am... you would say "Winchester air-to-ground" anyway. I release Vasily to head for Sochi and follow.

It is good to be back in the saddle again, as you say in America.



System Specs

- AMD Athlon 3000+ processor
- MachSpeed N2PAP-Lite motherboard with onboard Aureal AC97 sound
- PNY Technologies Verto NVIDIA GeForce 4 Ti 4600 video card with 128MB DDR
- 1GB Kingston PC2700 DDR DRAM
- Creative 12x CD-ROM

- Maxtor 40GB main drive
 - DirectX Version 9.0a
 - Windows 2000 with SP4
 - Thrustmaster Fox2 Pro USB joystick
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