

Feature

My First Medal!

A Lock On: Modern Air Combat Air to Ground Mission

by **Cat**

Spasibo, my friends! Today, I am very happy. I have some... you call it, "*fruit salad*"? for my uniform! Vasily, and all the 586th, are very proud of me. But not so much as I am of myself.

We hit Muqtadeh today, where it would hurt the most. After Vasily and I attacked the Turk base, Turkish F-16s attacked our cruiser Moskva and her consort Neustrashimy. And again, they failed, for *Moskva* downed all four while they were still outside range of their laser bombs. Now, the Turk is more circumspect. And it came to us that the Sheikh was planning revenge most foul indeed. In a small factory complex, placed near to a former resort hotel north of the Sukumi airbase, they began to make what you call weapons of mass destruction. The nerve-gas, called VX. Only Muqtadeh is so cruel as to use this for what he intended — terror attacks upon innocent, brotherly Georgians who choose not to follow him.

We would stop him.

At Sochi base we now have new friends from your NATO. The Americans have sent to us their A-10A Thunderbolt II aircraft. I do not understand why you call this a "*hog*". It is beautiful like our own Su-25! And it flies like silk, not wallow like pig in mud. The Americans think it is funny that I do not understand. It is a joke, *da*? And the British are here with Tornado jets, which will be part of our mission today.

***"I do not understand
why you call this
a "hog". It is beautiful
like our own Su-25!"***

The Americans are from your 52nd wing, from Germany. They are ill-equipped, tough — not like we had expected. Your war in Iraq and Afghanistan takes much in the way of equipment, and this we know well from our own war in the East. Even the very last Humvee is gone to the Iraq now. And your A-10 squadron came to Sochi with only "slick," low-drag bombs and some Rockeyes. Thankfully, the Americans are amply supplied with your peerless Maverick missile! This is most eagerly anticipated.

We will step up to help our new ally today. I have been dispatched to the A-10 squadron with Sergeant Kulikov and his team, and special kits that your China Lake experts have tested. These allow the use of Russian bombs on your A-10! I will fly with the American squadron and teach the use of our PB-250, FAB-250 and 500, RBK series cluster munitions, ZB and ZAB napalm bombs, and KMGU-2 dispensers. Our 250-kilo bombs are roughly equivalent to your 500-pounders, and our 500 kg bombs to your 1000 pounders, but heavier both; the American technical representatives from Republic are sure the pylons will handle the strain. Of all of us in the wing, only I have flown American aircraft before — I am type-rated for your F-16. And now, I will fly your A-10 as well!

After check-out by the instructor pilots of this squadron, I am ready to fly. We have briefed the squadron commander on the upgrade kits, and we have gone over the mission details. The A-10 is capable of much more than mere vehicle-plinking. It can be used in strategic role, too, and do precision strikes! Today, we will do this. But Colonel Martin, he is not impressed with the conversion kits.

"I don't trust this, Lieutenant. I'll be honest with you: I don't know who came up with this scheme, and I think our own Mark-84s would do the job on that building just fine. And forgive me, but I'm not used to turning over one of my warbirds to a foreign pilot for a combat mission. I'll personally be on your wing for this. And my bird will be properly loaded out, in case your ordinance hangs."

He means I will lead the flight? And lead him? He has much more experience than I. More than Vasily, who is junior even to me. Ah, but he does not trust me. I will win his trust.

"Thank you, Colonel. I will not disappoint you. You may rely on me, da?"

"I hope so."

In spite of his distrust, Col. Martin has given me my own A-10! It is dappled in strange spots of grey, brown, and green, no. AF84-727. Sgt. Kulikov and the American weapons personnel have armed my bird with the weapons I have chosen. This will be a low-altitude, fast dash across the relatively flat coastal plain to deliver PB-250 parachute-retarded munitions, from altitude of under 300 feet to make targeting hand-held missiles difficult. I will carry six. I also select the American Rockeye cluster bomb, two of them, and two of the IIR Maverick-D for targets of opportunity. True to his word, the Colonel has selected Mk-84, Mk-82, and a mix of Mavericks, in case I fail.

***"This will be
a low-altitude, fast dash
across the relatively flat
coastal plain..."***

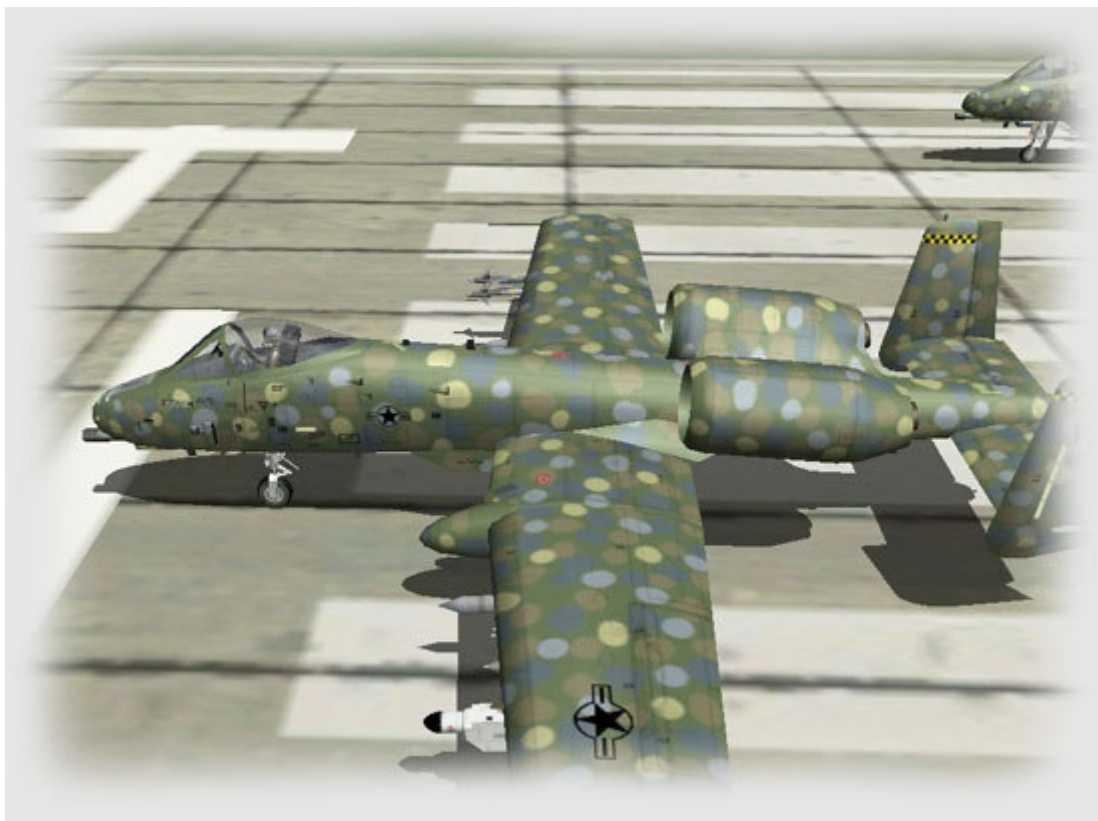
I will not fail.

The instructor pilots, Captain Rick Baker and Captain Tonia Markham, meet me as I dress out. They have for me a grey flight-helmet, like those the other American pilots wear, but this one is personalized! It has my name on it, and in our native language, too, along with a decal of a small hog with big fangs!

"So, this is why they call it the "hog," da? Because it has big fangs?"

Rick laughs at that. *"Da, Sacha. And we fight down and dirty, like a big ol' razorback!"*

In the cockpit, the American crew-chief motions me through the pre-flight checks. It is strange not to have Kulikov walking me out with the lighted wands! The General Electric turbofans whine behind my head, and the Colonel's jet starts up behind me. We taxi for the main runway.



“Colt 11 ready for takeoff.”

Ahead of us, two British Tornados, carrying ALARM anti-radar missiles, are aloft and heading for target. They will suppress the Sheik’s minions while I dash for target, and Col. Martin observes me.



I firewall the throttles and the big fans spool up.

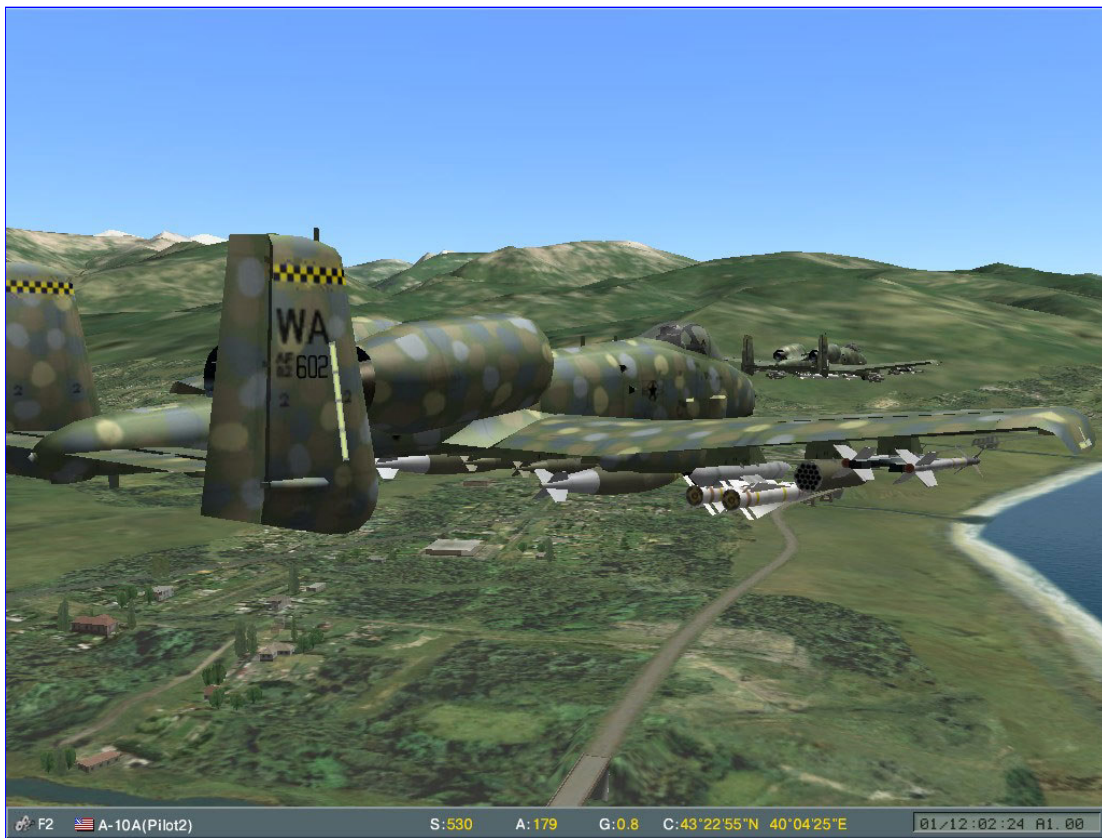
“Two, rolling.” Col. Martin is right with me, pulling his A-10 off the runway first. I hold the nose down to ensure I have plenty of speed, then gently rotate my 727 off the runway, pulling up gear and sliding into position over the railroad tracks leading out of Adler, heading south at 300 feet.

“Smoothly done, one-one.”

"Thank you. This craft is marvelous to fly!"

And it is! It does not wallow like hog at all! Your A-10 has wonderful pilot aids. It is so easy to navigate — just line up the marks on the HUD. It is like Su-27 or MiG-29, almost. Much easier to master than Su-25, in which I trained. We skim along, just three to four hundred feet high, following the railroad line. We sweep over a train, and a fire truck motoring slowly along the Adler-Gudauta highway. Unlike the last mission to Sukhumi, there is minimal turbulence.







I have binoculars in my pilot bag. Six miles ahead, and two thousand feet high, are the British. They have good vantage and can see much. My AN/ALR-69 RWR receiver is beeping the signals of Shilka vehicles and the Tarantul's radar. As we close, cruiser Moskva is busy, though. She is pounding the tiny harbor with Bazalt missiles. Muqtadeh's Tarantul missile corvette has impudently challenged Moskva with a Kh-41 missile, which the cruiser easily downed with SA-N-6. Now, the Sheikh's men will pay. Three P-500 missiles slam into the waterfront as the British, high above, watch. One, into a tanker come with unknown chemicals. It was our secondary target! Two more, into the missile-boat.

"Two, IP."

"Roger."





We see the British go to work. As I crest the top of a hill at the Initial Point and bring up the CCIP reticle, I see Strela and Igla missiles rise from the waterfront and the target, along with 23mm tracer from three Shilka vehicles. There is a convoy on the road coming up from Sukhumi airport. One can guess what it carries. I make a mental note for targeting after the attack run. Guarded with Igla, I will have to do this fast.

Unlike Russian aircraft, the Thunderbolt II has ability to set ripple modes and timing. I set for a six-bomb paired drop at ten ms between pairs, and wish that our Su-25 were so facile. Meanwhile, the British are unleashing the deadly ALARM. It plows into Strela vehicles-our intelligence did not tell us of this, that ALARM can target IR launchers!





Suddenly, my ALR-69 receiver falls silent. Thanks to the British, the way is clear. Col. Martin falls into trail behind me. I'm in the pipe. It is my show, now. I will make it count.



As my pipper approaches the target, I am at 380 feet altitude and I squeeze.



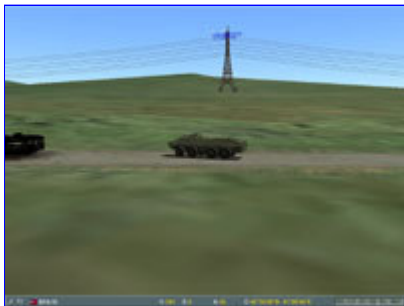
All six PB-250 pop loose and the A-10 jolts as it claws for the sky.



The blast is sudden, and lights the sky. If I had been lower, or slower, I might have been caught in it!



"One, that's both factory buildings, repeat, scratch them both."



I am not done. I will show Col. Martin how the Rodina trains its pilots. *"Colt 11, in hot on the convoy."*



I wheel in and target Rockeyes on the convoy of trucks. The British have been at work here with 20mm cannon, though-most of the enemy lie burning. I pop Rockeyes in a easy dive, and pull up, looking in my rear view.



The canisters spray submunitions, it is most satisfying. But the bombs had no effect! The BTR-70 still spits fire at Col. Martin!



I reef into a hard left and line up again, as a Tornado flashes down perpendicularly in a strafing run. A GAZ-66 truck explodes as I center the TVM display on a hot target.

"Colt 11, Rifle!"

The Maverick flies straight and true, blasting the unfortunate BTR into dust.



I set up for a run on the *Ivanov* class transport at the docks...



...and expend my remaining Maverick, leaving it in flames.

"Colt 11 off to the northeast. Colt 12, rejoin."



The return flight is uneventful. The British Tornados do a spectacular formation touchdown! I wish I could have seen it. I follow Col. Martin in, landing unspectacularly, but easily. The A-10 is such a joy to fly!



We taxi in, and he is waiting for me, with an offer for a drink at the O-club the Americans have set up.

“That was a fine piece of flying, Lt. Andreevna. The fireball from the bombs damn near caught you, though. Next time, you want to drop a little higher.”

"Our bombs, they blow things up, no?"

"Yes. Yes, they do." He looked thoughtful. "Those parachute bombs of yours will prove handy. What other munis do you all have that can be delivered like that?"

"Our fuel-air explosive is delivered like that."

"FAEs, huh. Interesting." He took a sip of his drink and considered. "Ours are cluster munitions. Yours might be able to get dropped in hot and low, like you did today. It's worth a thought. By the way, I'm sending a report to your commander. We'll be proud to have you stay with us for a bit, if you're game."

"Game...?"

"If you want to. Interested?"

"Da! We will kill many of the Sheikh's men together!"

And my commander, he was also pleased, for he reported to the Defense Minister, and I am awarded the *Order of Courage!* One must have much merit for this award. I am most happy about this.

And Muqtadeh, he has not heard the last of me, not yet. I will fly again with the Americans...soon.



Test System Specs

- AMD Athlon Thunderbird XP 2200+ processor overclocked to XP2500
- Asus A7N8X mainboard with onboard Aureal AC97 sound

- 512 MB 133MHz DDR SDRAM
- Creative 12x CD-ROM
- Maxtor 40GB main drive
- Windows XP
- Thrustmaster Fox2 Pro USB joystick
- PNY Technologies NVIDIA GeForce 4 Ti4600
using NVIDIA v52.16 drivers
- The mission was flown using the LOMAC Gold version