

THE PILOT EXCHANGE

PART 2

by Ellen Dean

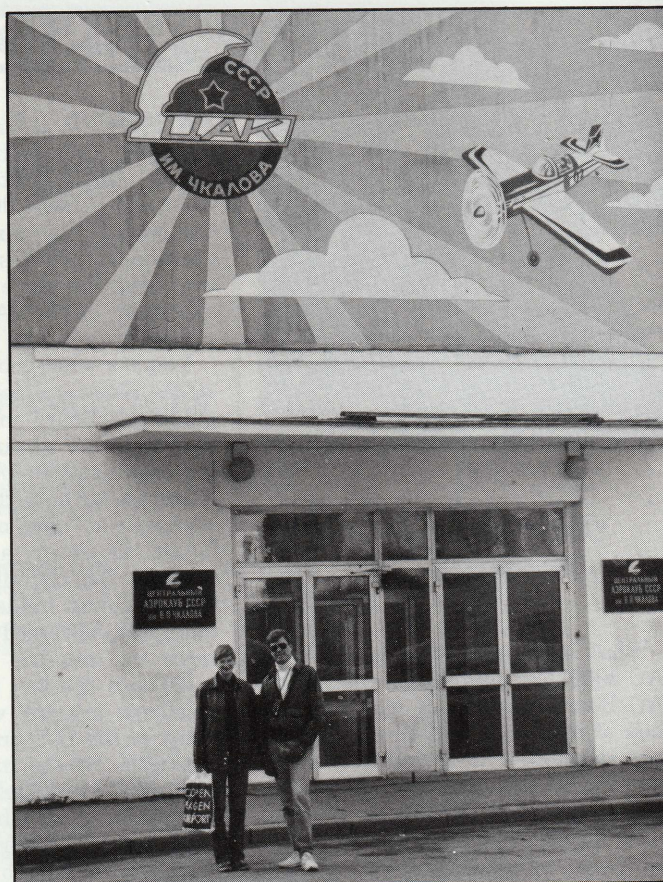
As of this writing the Soviet Union is dissolving as we have known it. I feel very privileged to have been given the opportunity to participate in the Soviet training camp, especially during such trying times. It was an experience of a lifetime and one that I will never forget.

The most important memory I have is of the people. The flying was wonderful, but the people will be what I remember most. In a nutshell, Kasum Nazhmudinov and all of the Soviets are the most polite, proud, humble and respectful people I have ever met. They have much to offer, both in skill and as people. The team is really a team. The three week training camp we participated in was one of four sessions given throughout the year. The Soviet team pilots and "hopefuls" are together for the entire time. They stay at the same hostel, they eat together, fly together, work together. It is more like a great big family where everyone watches out for each other. It is a feeling I won't soon forget to be brought into that family. Better than any medal at any contest.

All of us (Patty Wagstaff, John Morrissey, Pete & Sara Anderson, and I) arrived in Moscow about the same time. We were met by Jeff Barrie Pompano's representative in Moscow, and Elena Klimovich, one of the Soviet pilots who became our number one person — our guardian, administrator, organizer, and most of all friend. If we needed anything, one small word to Elena and she took care of the rest. From the airport we took a bus, stopped off to pick up Petr Belevantsev, Manager of the Central Aero Club of the USSR, and then off for a two hour bus ride to an airfield about 150 km north of Moscow near a little town called Borki. This was to be our home for the next three weeks. The hostel where we stayed is located right on the airfield. The area re-

minded me a little of northern Michigan or Wisconsin — fairly flat, but slightly rolling in some areas with farms and woods of spruce and fir.

Daily life consisted of meeting the bus at exactly 7:51 a.m. to go into town for breakfast, coming back to the hostel for a pilot briefing at 9:00 a.m., flying until lunch, flying after lunch, and then dinner. On days where the weather was not good enough for flying, usually due to "tooman" (fog), extracurricular activities consisted of volleyball, tennis, chess, discussions of aerobatics, ping pong, cards, reading or going for walks. Out of the three weeks there, we flew about half of the time. So, many of the days were very quiet which I enjoyed tremendously. During these times I got to know some of the Soviet pilots better than if we had not had such quiet times. Playing cards together, volleyball and tennis — it was wonderful to be included as "one of the gang" so to speak. This was where I learned to count in Russian. The Soviets really seem to enjoy doing things together and yet are very serious about everything they do. This was true in volleyball, tennis, chess — as well as in their flying.



Elena Klimovich and John Morrissey outside the Central Aero Club's headquarters in Moscow. Note the Sukhoi in the mural with the club's logo. The Central Aero Club has recently changed its name to the National Aero Club of Russia (NACR) and is petitioning FAI for representation rights for the Russian Republic.

To start, all of us Americans had one flight in the two-seat Yak 52 with Victor Smolin, one flight in the single-seat Yak 55 and then the rest of the time in the Sukhoi 26. Victor showed us all three aerobatic zones along with demonstrating some basic techniques for snapping the Yak 52. They use the same technique in all of their airplanes, including the Sukhoi. This is done by leading with rudder (full rudder is used) followed by a very brisk elevator and then accelerating the snap (brisk, slight opposite elevator). Inside and outside snaps use the same technique, just opposite elevator. No aileron is used for any snap. The Sukhoi really seems to take off when a snap is accelerated. In vertical rolls to the right, no rudder is needed, but a slight touch of left rudder is needed for left vertical rolls. Vertical rolls work better using two hands (to steady — the Sukhoi is very sensitive). Hammerheads were the hardest thing for me to get right. My tendency was to pivot way too early — when I thought it was time to pivot, usually I had another 5 seconds or so. The airplane just hovers.

Once we started flying the Sukhoi we were basically on our own. It was



Elena Klimovich with Ellen Dean. Elena attended the U.S. Nationals in September 1990 and here she is shown proudly wearing her Nationals T-shirt.



At the practice site in Borki — these buildings include a coffee shop, parachute room, briefing room, open shop, and "mobile control" (the truck with numerous antennae).

difficult for the Soviets to critique us as they did each other. Elena knew the most English and critiqued us some as she had time, but the others — even those who knew some English — were difficult to understand over the radio. In retrospect, I think it would have been better if I had been a little more structured about my approach. I did basic maneuvers to see what seemed to work best (e.g. which rudder for full and half vertical snaps, etc.) and then started tackling sequences. All of the Soviets, on the other hand, were doing only individual maneuvers or single lines from sequences such as their proposed known. Each pilot kept a notebook in which they wrote down notes, individual maneuvers and groups of maneuvers of what they were to work on that flight, and then had one of the veteran team pilots, such as Alexander Liuberets or Nikolai Nikitiuk, look this over and sign it. The pilots worked together and critiqued each other when flying in the aerobatic box over the airport. Two marked boxes, at 90° apart, were present in this box above the airport. The schedule for the Sukhoi's was very rigorous. Each Sukhoi had its flight time broken down into half-hour blocks. Twenty minutes flight, 10 minutes for landing, taxiing, fueling and having the next pilot strap in and take off. Everything ran like clockwork — the pilots, the mechanics, the airplanes. Almost like watching a dance. No time was wasted, especially when we were flying.

What I found with the Sukhoi, the little now that I've flown it, is that it is a very straight-forward airplane to fly, both in basic aerobatics and in general flying. It is a very easy tail-dragger to land and has more visibil-

ity than it might seem. However, to fly it well — that is, to fly it to its potential — would take a long time. The airplane has so much power a pilot can almost bluff his way through a sequence, but for the real precision that we see the Soviets fly it would take years: such as the multiple, high-speed snaps on a 45 or vertical line, stopped on a dime without any bobble.

I felt very comfortable with the Sukhoi. It feels very solid as if you couldn't break it, but it is also an airplane to respect. John O'Connell once described it as an airplane that will do anything you tell it to do — you just have to be sure of what you're telling it to do. The Soviets are very disciplined in how they fly the Sukhoi. They only fly 20 minutes at

a time and only two or at the most three flights a day. They are also careful about negative G's and will normally only fly a hard sequence or set of maneuvers in one of their flights on a given day.

Although most of the time we spent at the airfield at Borki, we did get down to Moscow a couple times where we got a whirlwind tour from Jeff Barrie of the sights in Moscow, including Red Square, and saw the changing of the guards in front of Lenin's tomb. Then off to get a tour of the Sukhoi factory followed by a dinner hosted by Mr. Siminoff and Sukhoi. Finally a two hour bus ride back to Borki. The second trip to Moscow, we flew down in a Yak 18. Our pilot flew us around the perimeter of



John Morrissey, 1992 U.S. Aerobatic Team trainer, with Petr Belevantsev (left), President of the National Aero Club of Russia, and Elena Klimovich. They are shown in the aerobatic trophy room of the Aero Club, where the many trophies are displayed that have been won by Soviet pilots over the years.

Moscow before landing at Tuchino airport, in front of the Central Aero Club headquarters in Moscow. This time Elena and Petr showed us around the Central Aero Club, including the large trophy room for all of the Soviet Aerobatic Teams over the years. This was followed by another tour of Moscow given by Evgeni Nazarjuk who works for Petr.

The food in Russia is different than here, but I thought it was very good. Meat and potatoes three meals a day; cabbage, beets, peas and potatoes were the main vegetables; good, thick brown bread and small cake biscuits or cookies at every meal; soups or borscht of beets, cream, meat — beef or mutton, usually — onions, and potatoes. Coffee, hot chocolate and a hot fruit “compote” made from boiling apples were the usual drinks. Most of the time we ate in the cafeteria in Borki with the local townspeople. On the days when the cafeteria was closed, Elena and the other girls would cook for us at the hostel. No fast or processed foods here. Everyone knows how to cook and create meals from the basics — eggs, butter, sugar, onions, meat, potatoes, etc. — without recipes. It would have been good to have gotten in on all this and learned some, but anytime any of us would try to help they would politely, but firmly shoo us out of the kitchen.

Although Kasum and the Soviets work and play hard at whatever they do, they also enjoy parties and don't seem to need much of an excuse to throw one. Somehow they found out it was my birthday and so took the opportunity to throw a party. Cakes, cookies, chocolates and many gifts followed by dancing — these people love to dance. We had earlier that evening gotten together with some young people at a nearby town — Kimri — for a little social gathering. Nikolai Timofeev played several what sounded like Russian folk songs on the guitar which most of the local people there seemed to know.

Our next part came on the night before leaving. Again — a big dinner and cakes, gifts exchanged and toasts given. Then many hugs and tears from saying goodbye and then off to pack and get a couple of hours sleep before getting up to leave at 3 a.m. A little before 3 the next morning as we were packing our bags in Nikolai Timofeev's and Nikolai Nikitiuk's cars, one by one Kasum and all of the Soviet pilots began to show up to see



The American delegation in Red Square in Moscow . . . John Morrissey, Sara Anderson (who attended at her own expense), Peter Anderson, Ellen Dean, and Patty Wagstaff.

us off. I will never forget saying goodbye to all of them for one last time on the steps of our hostel. Never could anyone be given a greater honor or gift or found it more difficult to leave.

I am not exactly sure what I expected from our trip, but I could not have been given a greater gift than to be part of the USSR/USA exchange program. In a time when daily life and concerns seem to overtake all thoughts and energy, the three weeks in Borki was a gift of friendship, peace, and a time to calmly focus on important things including flying, people and putting perspective on

daily life back in the States. Such programs in aviation and many other areas can only help to open lines of communication and friendship and result in mutual benefit between formally isolated groups of people.

It saddens and worries me thinking about the struggle all of the Soviets must now be going through. I hope that they will manage through all these changes and keep what is one of their greatest possessions — their quality as people. They have so much to offer, most importantly — their heart. I know that a part of mine was left in Borki.



The Sukhoi Design Bureau in Moscow. Note that the flags flown include the U.S., Russian Republic, and the Soviet flags.