

THE PILOT EXCHANGE

If we have learned anything during the decade of the 80's and the beginning of the 90's, it is nothing is predictable in the world around us. So many changes have occurred these last three years, it is confusing, mind boggling, gratifying, and exciting — all at the same time. When I became IAC President in 1981 and later the U.S. delegate to the FAI International Aerobatics Commission (CIVA), issues seemed to be pretty predictable. The cold war was in full swing, our relations with the Soviet Union were peaceful but tense, our President, Ronald Reagan, was in the beginnings of a massive military buildup, and the Berlin wall was solidly in place with nothing to indicate it would not remain so for many more decades.

My first trip to the CIVA meetings was in 1984. At that time, I was the U.S. Alternate Delegate with Clint McHenry heading up our delegation. I have always trusted Clint implicitly and he provided much wise counsel as to the workings of CIVA and our relationships with other countries. Charlie Hillard had been kind enough

to provide Clint equally good advice when he moved into the alternate slot. So the training continued. Naturally, I was excited about meeting all of the Delegates of which I had heard so much and to see the Commission in operation. After 14 years of being completely involved in American aerobatics, it was to be quite a change. But most of all, I wanted to meet the Soviets . . . because of the mystery about them, because I had little contact with them in the past (only some brief encounters at the World Aerobatic Championships in Austria in 1982), and because they were the principal rivals of the Americans in world competition. This was a year before “glasnost” and “perestroika” became household words in America.

The meeting was held in Paris and I can remember every detail of my first introduction to the Soviet Union's Delegate to CIVA, Kasum Nazhmudinov. I was immediately impressed by his warmth and humanity . . . though he spoke no English, it was something you could easily sense. We became friends instantly.

In 1985, I was chosen to be Delegate and at the CIVA meeting that year, was elected to the International Jury for the 1986 World Championships in England. At that contest, I worked with Kasum every day and we became quite comfortable in each other's company. Thus, it was in 1986 that I invited him to attend the EAA's Fly-In Convention in Oshkosh, Wisconsin and sent him home with a whole package of materials, including SPORT AVIATION magazine, an Oshkosh program book, a videotape, and other materials. I hoped he would accept immediately. It was not, however, until 1989 that Kasum, along with interpreter Vladimir Garankin, was able to attend. It was an occasion I will never forget and is probably a subject for a memoir some day. I do remember our parting was emotional and tearful. They really had become friends . . . and the Soviets take friendship seriously.

But, in any event, on his way to New York with Bob Wagstaff, President of the U.S. Aerobatic Foundation, the idea of having a Soviet/American pilot exchange program

Americans and Russians Flying Together

by Mike Heuer

was broached. Bob told me of the idea later on his return from New York and I was very enthusiastic. The Soviets wanted American pilots to come to the USSR and fly at one of their training camps at Essentuki near the Black Sea. Bob and I both felt it would be an opportunity to accomplish a variety of things — to improve the relationship between our countries, to learn of Soviet training methods and techniques, to fly the Soviet aircraft, and to simply learn more about each other.

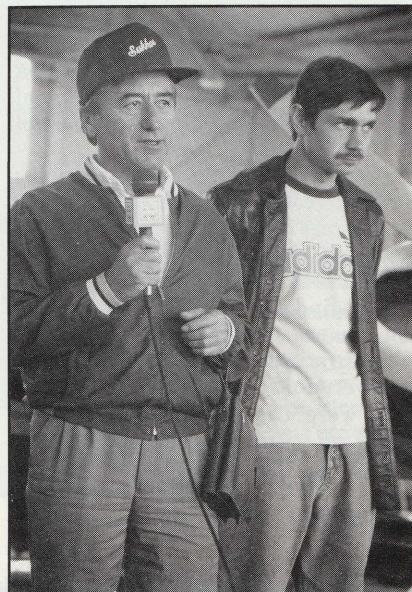
One of the Fédération Aéronautique Internationale's purposes is to promote international understanding and goodwill. The purpose of the Olympics is much the same. How many times have we learned that by becoming friends on a one-on-one basis and by talking to each other, we can avoid misunderstandings and conflict. We decided to do it in aerobatics as well. The wheels were put in motion at the CIVA meeting in 1989 in Dublin, Ireland. Our plan was for Soviet pilots to attend the U.S. Nationals in September 1990 and for our pilots to attend the Soviet's training camp that fall. However, because of time and financial considerations, our half of the visit was postponed until the fall of 1991.

The Soviets who attended the Nationals in 1990 were Nikolai Nikitiuk and Elena Klimovich. Nikolai has been a European Champion, a consistent medal winner at the WAC, and one tough, capable pilot. Elena, a relative newcomer to the Soviet National Team at that time, was charming, talented, and somewhat fluent in English. As most IAC members know, they flew very well that year and we enjoyed their stay with us. They, too, had become good friends.

Previous to their visit, the IAC Board of Directors had decided in March 1990 to send Clint McHenry, Lee Manelski, Ellen Dean, and Patty



1990 Nationals Contest Director Finn Jensen (left) and IAC President Steve Morris (second from right) welcome Kasum Nazhmudinov to the Nationals.



Kasum Nazhmudinov participates in a press conference at the Nationals site in 1990 prior to the beginning of the competition.

Wagstaff to the USSR for the camp. These pilots were selected not just on their piloting abilities — though that was important — but for their ambassadorial skills. They were people we could be sure would represent the United States well because of their "people skills" and their professionalism. Clint was regarded as particularly valuable because of his experience flying the Sukhois, which were now being imported into the U.S., because he was a veteran of many trips to the Soviet Union, and because he was so highly regarded by the Soviets. Later on, however, Clint had to cancel.

With the death of Lee Manelski in early 1991, the Board was faced with the selection of a replacement and chose Peter Anderson, newly crowned National Champion, as the new member of the delegation. Clint, however, was not replaced in order to keep costs under control. John Morrissey, who became the U.S. Team trainer for the 1992 WAC, was also chosen later to attend the camp as we believed it very important to have the trainer there to observe their methods.

At the March 1991 meeting of the IAC Board, a final budget for the trip was approved and the U.S. Aerobatic Foundation also agreed to fund 50% of the trip. They wisely perceived that their investment would pay off in Team performance at the 1992 WAC as key people would be exposed to the training camp and "European" style flying. Despite the fact that our visit would benefit our Team, the Russians (no longer "Soviets") extended every assistance. The details of that cooperation and the trip itself will be told in a multi-part series in SPORT AEROBATICS by the people involved . . . Patty Wagstaff, John Morrissey, and Ellen Dean. Altogether, IAC spent \$3,834.75 in 1991 on the program . . . a little over 1% of our total budget. The benefits have been enormous.

At the press conference prior to the beginning of the Nationals, the Soviet delegation is welcomed by the Mayor of Denison, Ben Munson. The Mayor is shaking hands with Kasum Nazhmudinov.





Jean Sorg

Pompano Air Center provided the Sukhoi SU-26 for Elena Klimovich and Nikolai Nikitiuk to fly at the 1990 Nationals, complete with their names on the side. Note the "Okie Twisters" sticker on the aircraft. IAC Chapter 59's cooperation was essential in the success of the Soviet visit.

In a letter sent to U.S. Aerobatic Team pilots in early February 1992, John Morrissey discussed some of the things he learned in Russia, how he spent hour upon hour with Kasum Nazhmudinov discussing the fine points of judging, flying, and training (Kasum has been coaching since 1969 — the longest of anyone on the world scene), and he passed on this wisdom, knowledge, and experience to the Team pilots. Never have I seen such a comprehensive analysis of what Team training should involve. As a side note, I believe we can expect some articles from John, who also contributes to SPORT AEROBATICS from time to time, on training, flying, and critiquing in general . . . something that will benefit all pilots pre-

paring for competition flying or just puttering around. His observations on G-tolerance, which we hope to feature, will be particularly helpful to all IAC pilots. So the investment paid off for IAC, too.

The exchange program has not been without controversy and the IAC leadership has undergone some criticism as a result of it. As we all work to get the "cold war" out of our bones, I don't find this particularly surprising . . . especially among those of us who grew up to distrust the Russians and were told by our government that they were the enemy. Others have taken an "American First" attitude regarding the expenditure of IAC funds. I have found all of these views to be myopic and not beneficial to IAC

in the long run. Everyone should remember that the first word in our organization's name is "International" and we have a responsibility to promote aerobatics around the world and establish ties with pilots everywhere. Aside from that, the world is changing and we need to be a part of that change . . . personally, I treasure my friendships all over the world and thank God that aerobatics has provided me this opportunity. It is an opportunity available to any IAC member who wishes to get involved in his organization . . . whether it be in a Chapter, at our Nationals, at Fond du Lac, or as a member of the U.S. Team. We need all of your help. And I think of John Morrissey . . . Viet Nam veteran, career Air Force fighter pilot, and quintessential cold warrior . . . and what the trip meant to him. No more enemies, only friends.

Indeed, as Ellen Dean has so eloquently told me, aerobatics and our friendships are a gift . . . and ones that must be preserved. The door is open in Russia for future visits and we hope they can occur. I also hope that the Russians will be back here as well.

There are many people to thank for making this program possible . . . most certainly the Board of Directors of IAC and the U.S. Aerobatic Foundation first of all. Pompano Air Center furnished the aircraft, Buck Wagon and others of IAC Chapter 59 — the "Okie Twisters" in Oklahoma City — who arranged the Soviet practice before Nationals in 1990, and everyone who accorded them a warm welcome here.

I believe you will enjoy the accounts of Patty, Ellen, and John in the coming months. They have all provided

Pushing out the Sukhoi (called the "Sook" by the Russians) in the morning at the Nationals. Notice the teamwork . . . typical of the Russians working together. The members of the American delegation that went to Russia last October all remarked on this . . . how teamwork and cooperation is such a major part of their training, competition, and Team. In this picture you have the interpreter, mechanic, pilot, coach, and chief delegate all working together.



Jean Sorg

many photos to accompany their writings and it has been a difficult task to figure out which to run in this magazine . . . there are so many good ones. But all of the delegation deserve our thanks for doing such a fine job in representing IAC and the United States of America.

As we enter 1992 and as this is being written, there still remains much uncertainty in the world and in the new Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS). We wish all of our pilot friends there our best wishes and hopes that we will see them at many future aerobatic competitions to come.

1990 was also the 100th anniversary of the birth of U.S. President Dwight Eisenhower, who was born in Denison, Texas, site of the Nationals. Denison Area Chamber of Commerce official Anna McKinney (center) is pictured here with Kasum Nazhmudinov, Soviet Team coach, and Peter Belevantsev, then head of the Central Aero Club in Moscow. Peter is now President of the Russian Republic's National Aero Club of Russia (NACR) which is seeking the recognition of the Fédération Aéronautique Internationale at the time of this writing.



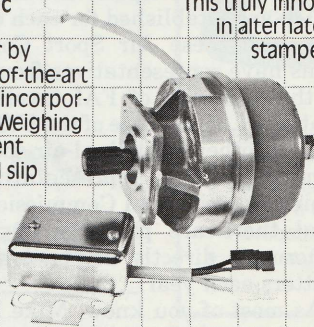
A very proud Elena Klimovich claimed the "Betty Skelton First Lady of Aerobatics Trophy" at the 1990 Nationals as well as second place in Unlimited.



A parade was held in Denison the day after the Nationals ended to honor Eisenhower's birthday and unbeknownst to most IAC members, the Soviets represented IAC and aerobatics in the parade. Here Nikolai and Elena are shown waving American flags. The other convertible carried the rest of the delegation.

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