



MiG 21F

26-1112

a short story



26-1112 was and perhaps still is a MiG-21F

I met this creature on Oct 5th 1994 at Prague Military
Airport, one day before my 24th birthday

She was closed into a hangar and that was all I could see and
touch

I had ran after her for about a month and a half, living day
and night in a sort of nightmare where the impossible could
happen:

I could buy a MiG-21F for \$6.000 before Nov 9 1994.
Beyond that, they would cut the thing into pieces: the Warsaw
Pact was crumbling and the international relationships
dictated that a number of fighter aircrafts should be
dismantled

What was I going to do with her? Did I have a program? A
plan? I was living in an unsteady situation (like most of my
life), I remember phone calls to the canadian aircraft broker
from a streetphone, I remember faxes sent and received at
tobacconists shops where I used to live... I remember the
first phone call, when Mo (Rosemary) the girlfriend I was
living with, gave me the courage to call the guy

There's always been an unbroken link between me and a
fighter aircraft, it still persists today, I can only imagine what
it was at that time. The fact they did not let me be a fighter
pilot was aching terribly, I recall lying in bed watching the
white ceiling of my bedroom for months after failing the
medical examinations for a dischromatopsia I was born with.
I recall crying up to getting my throat completely blocked at
night in bed like there's no tomorrow, and it really there was
not. There has been no tomorrow for about ten years, as I had
lost my star. I was learning to live in a future with no me and

fighter aircraft together. But the fighter aircraft was inside me and I wasn't letting it go, somehow a personal affair between me and the metal mass... the rest of the world and its regulations was out of this. The fighter aircraft was a sort of space ship with me and we could keep up living independently from the rest.

With just a small inconvenient: I was not flying a fighter aircraft

So was I going to fly 26-1112 after buying it? I did not even had the 6.000\$. With something more than 20.000\$ the broker's aircraft maintenance facility friends -right on the spot airport- could overhaul the a/c and make it airworthy. I started driving some people into the story, I placed an absolutely one-of-a-kind announcement at the aeronautical engineering faculty where I had used to study (but later abandoned guess why)...the ad was stating the unbelievable price and whole story setup, a collage of the original Trade-A-Plane ad, faxes with a/c data and state of its systems, and proposed plan: let's buy it, and we'll see later.

Only a student guy called back, a strange and somehow « intimistic » guy but -hey- you cannot expect normal people to call here

I talked to a pilot friend who had pursued the usual son-of-nobody career in getting his ratings flying both in US and Italy; he drove me through a contact and I found myself into a house full of ANY SORT of weapons, night visors, grenades, I think a hand launchable anti aircraft missile too... and everything else is necessary to go straight into jail for the rest of your life no matter if you are a collector. Anyhow the meeting was nothing special and the guys were not crazy about the 21... but somehow I took the decision to go myself and see the thing for true. The student guy elected to come too, so we met the night at a primary Italian train station and

left for Prague. I don't even remember what he showed in his
hands to make myself aware.
But I recall leaving my small town train station the afternoon
before.... My mother, father and sister on the platform....
Where is Marco going? Marco is going to Prague to buy a
MiG-21F

My mother always says that it's important and good for
Marco to make experiences. You bet

Prague was a city with a MiG-21F in its close nearby: that's
all I recall as a touristic impression as soon as we got there.

A couple of days after I would walk alone through Prague
with no object and for the first time in my life I would feel
appropriate among people : I had nothing to share with
people on the ordinary side of events

We shared a flat with some other guys and met straight away
with the broker. What a character. I had no idea on what to
say and how such a thing goes on

The day after, he and a close friend of him came to pick us
and we headed for the military airport. The two of them
looked exactly like the cat and the fox in the famous
« Pinocchio » Italian tale and since then a lot of strange
things happened.

We just entered the military airport with no need to say or
show anything, we went into the MiG maintenance facilities
business offices (the MiGs were no more property of the
Czech State) and the boss showed us the basic airframe and
powerplant maintenance log status for 26-1112, while the
secretary was serving a minimalistic tea and biscuits at a
minimalistic meeting board table. The engine had been
replaced on the airframe and it was somehow halfway to a
main overhaul. The airframe still had some 500 hours or
more before a major overhaul. I was fascinated by this simple

people who were showing me the logs of a MiG-21 they had stored not far away, not adding unnecessary commentaries, just doing what we all were there for, without any coldness or detachment.... just being humans. I felt at ease.

I asked for the detailed airframe and powerplant logs but the boss said the logs were covered by military secret. Hmmm.

How'm gonna buy a used aircraft if I cannot know its history? Was I supposed to say something? They added that they can deliver it airworthy and they certify that it is airworthy, so why bother? I must have looked at them in frank resignation. Anyhow, it was not the point to discuss at the moment, as I only had some 62.5 hours total time as a pilot and supersonic jet rating was just the only thing I was missing

We got out from the building and I began to look myself around as we strolled to the maintenance hangars. It was a military airport but I could not see many aircrafts... the cat or the fox were casually pointing at a transport Mil helicopter here or there and claiming a price... they were joking and I think they were making some fun of us

I saw a MiG-23 sitting on the tarmac and it was a kick in my stomach as it was completely painted in red and black with crazy devils running all through the sides and the gigantic rudder fin... it was really a strong image, a beast more than an aircraft. It was sitting alone in the middle of nowhere and this loneliness added power to the image

We entered a first hangar and I found myself face to face with the gun turret of a Mil-Mi24-Hind combat helicopter... amazingly bigger than I could ever imagine. There was a maintenance guy working on the turbine compartment up there... our friends just said we got the wrong hangar and we're not supposed to be there

The second hangar was the good one and while the fox was talking and telling some sort of stuff I realized that those things I was seeing lined up along the hangar walls as they were dishes lined up in a kitchen, well... those things were dozen and dozen of MiG-21 wings. The hangar was mainly filled with 21s fuselages lined up side by side tip to tail. Some tails were off, some others still had the Czech emblem painted on them. The fox was bursting explanations on how well the MiGs are built, entirely out of titanium, and I was trying to collect some information from my memory and thinking that this could not be, but I left him chatting as -I recalled to myself- I was just missing the supersonic jet type rating

I had piled up rather a culture on all 21s versions, engines, systems... because I had to know what kind of a/c I was going to be headed to. I had consulted all the Jane's I could get my hands on. I remember I knew basically everything by heart. Now, I don't recall nearly anything, I must have removed such sick information from my mind

We walked to another hangar, a sort of quieter one and it was quite dark around, like there were some trees or stuff, or maybe some heavy cloud was passing by. It was a cloudy day anyhow, overcast

Inside this one there were fully assembled 21s. The second one was 26-1112

I walked around and started taking photographs, inside I was a looser already. Somehow or somewhere before I had decided I would not get the MiG. It was crazy as a start but somehow I woke up

The grey creature sat in front of the hangar door.. at the end of the photo tour I asked if the canopy could be lifted as I had

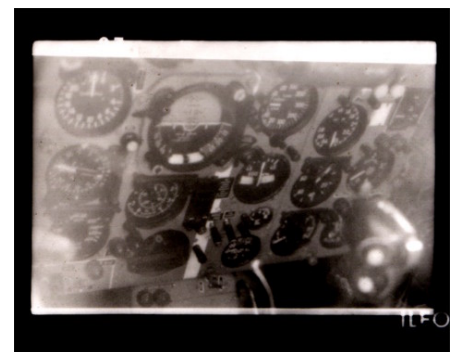
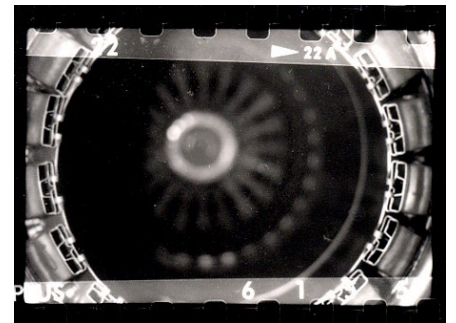
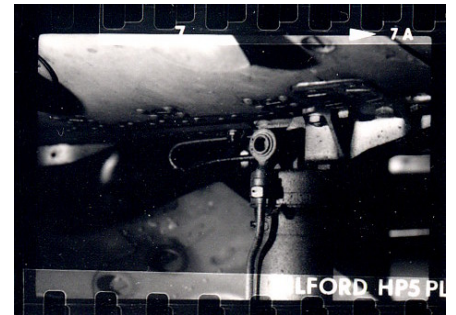


imagined me myself seating inside that thing looking straight into the hangar door. The fox said that there was no air pressure to lift the canopy and that was it. I peeked close to the cockpit and realized how tiny it was, I looked at the metal mass behind that small seat and biological space, I imagined this same thing has flown twice the speed of sound, those small wings there, this small space here, a small man here, just a thick flat frontal windscreen and that's it

As the fox was continuing with his lithany I was trying to collect my ideas. I had not felt the machine, I had not felt the great call. Was I supposed to break my heart? Everything was so sad, miserable, wretched. Why? What the hell was I doing here, in a dark hangar with a MiG-21F and a practically unfeasible plan for flying it? Why a written down sequence of money payments and authorizations could not carry this thing where I'd like to? Who was this guy in front of me, talking of 21s as he would talk of spaghetti and who will, the following day, meet with me again somewhere in Prague for some last information.... carrying 26-1112 documents in a casual and worn-out supermarket plastic shopper?

The student guy with me left Prague on that evening...actually, since we entered the airport, I entered in a solipsistic trip within myself

On my 24th birthday day, I took a strongly thought-over photo of a Christ on a should-have-been famous bridge over the Moldava, I watched a should-have-been special clock hanging from a church, but above all I focused on people, on people running their lives, as I finally felt detached from having to deal with normality and felt instead officially



attached to the dramatic part of existence running beyond all
this gigantic circus

On the way back on train, I watched the snowy Czech
landscape and felt like to stop, walk through the big white
and disappear in the big cold. A story between me and the
World



At Brno, I had one of my superthoughts: I got off the train to
send a postcard, I had convinced myself it had to be sent
from the Czech territory. Well, I saw the train leaving from
the station as I was paying for the stamp. With all my stuff
on it.

I run on the platform shouting something, it must have been a
true stupid scene, but nothing compared to what I did
immediately after: I saw another train leaving in the same
direction so I crossed any sort of platform and railtracks to
get at it....it was travelling quite faster than me, I was
running beside it right on the ballast, I recall just glimpsing
forward and just jumping over a points lever and continuing
running looking backward at the door which was going to
pass beside me. I grabbed the handle and got myself on the
step in perfect spy-story style (Bond, James Bond).



I entered the wagon and everybody stared at me as I had
plummeted on the train on a MiG-21F and had got out of the
cockpit. I asked where the train was heading to and nobody
spoke english or understood what was going on.

So I'm not telling you what the hell I did to get back to the
last known position and eventually to get to Wien on the next
train and find there a friend guy -with whom I had started
some talking onboard the first train- waiting for me with my
stuff

« Hey I've rented a room in a hotel and we could find some
girls ». This was frankly too much and I denied the invitation

I needed some peace of mind and restore some sort of
equilibrium

After a few days the whole story didn't look so weird (at
least the MiG part of it) and I begun to set a sort of
sponsorization plan for piling up some money. The thing was
aimed at having a certified pilot fly the thorn thing at
airshows. The fox could provide the pilot and a two-crew
maintenance team, and spare parts, so what? I would use this
setup to get progressively into the flying business. So I was
devising potential sponsors which might be interested in such
an adventure, writing letters and faxes all the time for a
couple of weeks. I recall writing to Avirex (imagine the
Avirex logo flashing by under the delta-shaped wing of the
21) and even to peace organisations (imagine The Peace
Logo flashing by under a 21 !!!!! what a shot). No need to
say that nothing worked.

With my pilot friend we contacted a guy who had imported
in Italy an L39 Albatross... this guy had plenty of money and
no sort of problems at all... when he got our thing, he raised
his eyebrows and said « do you have any idea of how much
will you have to pay as noise abatement fees each time you
take off from any sort of airport with such a thing? » He also
added he strongly doubted any airport would accept
operating such a low-tech flying grave
Still from a streetphone, I call some sort of ministry bureau
dealing with arms and warstuff import/export. I state the
thing is a demilitarized aircraft from the eastern block. They
ask what type of Helicopter. I reply it's an Aircraft. They ask
what type of aircraft trainer. I reply it's not a trainer, it's a
supersonic fighter : a MiG-21F. They change tone of voice
and say « hold on ». They switch to another guy who starts
enquiring almost dramatically about what's my name etc. I
hang up

It has been difficult being myself in this life

*I wrote this story all in a row during the night of 23rd-24th Oct 2004,
exactly ten years and nineteen days after I met 26-1112*

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There is a poem Mo wrote about the spirit of the MiG
adventure as she lived it. I recall only the beginning and the
end. It started with

“Patchwork hills and patchwork sky”

and ended with

“flashing by”

Thanks Mo for being there in those days, even if I was not
there

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