

Back to the Mothership

Spring 2018

For the first time in several years, I made the long trek east to see my compatriots in both our Moscow and Minsk Eagle Dynamics offices. With tools like Skype and other meeting software, the need for travel is much less than it used to be when I first started working with Eagle Dynamics back in 2001. My trip was two-fold: meet with the team and discuss current and future projects and say goodbye to our beloved director, Dr. Igor Tishin. Igor's funeral was 40 days prior, and it is Russian custom to have a remembrance 40 days later. It was important for me to say goodbye to a dear friend, mentor, comrade.



Figure 1. Remembrance for Igor

I still remember my first meeting with Igor in 2001 during my first visit as the publishing producer for Ubisoft. He took me around the city, and we ended up in Red Square having tea overlooking Lenin's Tomb. It struck me how profound the world had changed in the span of a few short years in which a former CIA intelligence analyst and a former engineer designing Russian missiles are now joining forces to create a game together (Lock On: Modern Air Combat). Sitting there in Red Square was surreal, but it was also the beginning of a greatly valued relationship that I miss.

Before reaching our main office on Moscow, I met up with Kate at our Minsk office in Belorussia. Kate is now our studio director and a fantastic manager and a joy to work with. Our Minsk office has since moved to a new location in Minsk, but its primary work centers on maps (Caucasus, Nevada and Persian Gulf), object creation like new weapons, and motion capture.

In addition to map production, another huge responsibility of the Minsk office is the creation and maintenance of the Terrain Development Kit (TDK). Not only is this the tool we use internally to create maps, it is the same tool we provide to qualified 3rd parties to create maps within DCS World. The team just recently completed version 2.0 of the TDK that brings greatly expanded functions with enhanced ease-of-use.

The team in Minsk has also been deeply involved with creating the coding frame work and recording of



Figure 2. Minsk Office

motion capture. This is particularly important for the new and greatly improved motion capture that we are using for the aircraft carrier deck crew in terms of fluidity, detail of skeletal animation, and code optimization. This will in turn be applied to other elements of the game like infantry, pilot animations, etc.

When I was there, much of the focus was on getting the Persian Gulf Map ready for launch. As you might imagine, there was a lot of bug fixing, identifying areas of needed improvement, and planning out how we would support and expand the map. Months later, we are close to considering the map the complete once Liwa and Ras al Khaimah airfields and the Bam and Persepolis archeological sites are in. After that, the Minsk map team will be focused on two new WWII maps that are already in development.



Figure 3. Minsk Office



Figure 4. Minsk MoCap Studio

After three days in Minsk and having a game plan to release the Persian Gulf map, it was off to Moscow. At this point our company owner and leader, Mr. Nick Grey, joined us. I've known Nick for many years, and he is truly the most interesting man in the world, from my point of view. Not only the owner of Eagle Dynamics and several other companies, he is also the managing director of The Fighter Collection, which operates and restores the largest private collection of warbirds in



Figure 5. Nick and Kate

Europe. In fact, Nick also flies most of the TFC aircraft. For our warbirds, we have a subject matter expert at the top!

Another central part of Eagle Dynamics is our Zhukovsky studio, outside of Moscow. Formerly known as our BelsimTek studio, we later integrated the studio back into Eagle Dynamics last year. Now as back then, the biggest focus on our Zhukovsky team has been the Hornet. Our line producer in charge of the Hornet in Zhukovsky is Sasha, a former MiG-29 pilot. Given that my Russian is terrible, and Sasha's English is not much better, there was a lot of talking with hands as we spent days going over finer points of the Hornet and mapping out its sustained development plan.



Figure 6. One of the Moscow offices

While most of my time was spent working with the team on the Hornet, there was also a lot of strategic planning of current and future projects.

While I was head-down on the Hornet, it was entertaining to watch Nick and Yoyo (one of our flight dynamics engineers) getting quite animated discussing takeoff and landing performance of the Bf 109. We are quite lucky to have a company owner that has a true passion for the product and is deeply involved to make it as accurate as possible.

While there, there was also much discussion with other elements of the Moscow team that are working on the warbirds, dedicated server, further optimizations of the graphics engine, tools development, customer communications, a new customer loyalty program (more on this soon), AI priorities, and many other topics. I was there for only three days, but two weeks would have been better.

Coming out to see the team, I was a bit concerned about moral given the loss of Igor. However, the team is on very sure footing and is in fact more focused and motivated than I had ever seen. I've worked with several development teams over my 30 years in this industry and I've never worked with a more dedicated and impassioned group that seek excellence in all they do. It really is a special group.

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