

With the 'legend' himself !

General Alexander Kharchevsky, synonymous with the Su-30SM



Major General Alexander Kharchevsky (in photo above) is arguably one of the most famous military pilots of Russia extant and his name is synonymous with that of the Sukhoi Su-30SM. General Kharchevsky became a household name in Russia in 2000 when he piloted a Su-27UB twin-seater, with Vladimir Putin, then acting President of Russia as its second crew member.

The General was for about 20 years commander of the Russian Air Force's Centre for Combat Employment and Retraining of Personnel VVS which is a research, training and instructional centre. He also formed, trained and then led the famous aerobatic team *Russian Falcons*, first equipped with Su-27 and later with Su-30SMs, which he describes a "gift of his fate", being the latest avatar of the family of Su-30MKI super-maneuverable multi-role fighter which has out performed western fighter types in simulated combat at various air exercises.

Manufactured by IRKUT, the Su-30SM fighter was developed to meet requirements of the Russian Air Force, the prototype making its maiden flight in September

2012. The multirole Su-30SM can be deployed in counter-air strikes, counter-land and counter-sea missions, can conduct electronic counter-countermeasures and early warning tasks. The aircraft also acts as a command-and-control platform within a formation of combat aircraft in joint missions.

In 2015, General Kharchevsky formally retired from service at the age of 65 with his flying career spanning more than 45 years. Vayu's Interview with the General

VAYU : Sir, you were involved in development of the Su-30SM before this type aircraft became operational with the Russian Aerospace Forces. What is your perception of this combat aircraft?

AK: Some time back, I used to fly a Su-30MKI fighter, which became the precursor of an entire family of combat aircraft, including the Su-30SM. The aircraft made an exceptional impression on me, having all the performances that are necessary for a modern fighter. Ever since I started flying, I have dreamt of flying an aircraft that exactly fulfills one's desires : Success in air battle completely depends

on this. The Su-30MKI become such an aircraft whose pilot does not need to think on how to enter combat, increase speed and altitude. The super maneuverability of the aircraft and its computerised systems permit the employment of weapons at any angle of attack, speed and altitude.

VAYU : What was your position and experience at that time ?

AK: I was in charge of the Centre for Combat Employment and Retraining of Personnel. My experience as a fighter pilot exceeded 30 years, had flown all the fighters that were in service in Russia, so could compare. It must be noted, that I and many other pilots at this Centre had experience in air combat exercising against the best foreign fighters including American ones. We knew the strengths and weaknesses of our fighters and of their rivals.

VAYU : How did Russian fighters perform against their competitors?

AK: During the 1990s, in terms of flight characteristics and accordingly, in close combat, our 4th generation fighters out performed their foreign counterparts, but their avionics at that time lagged behind the western ones. With launching of the Su-30MKI/SM family of fighters, this situation changed radically. Because of the airborne phased-array radar and armament control system, we were able to hit targets well beyond visual range. With new avionics and weapons, the aircraft became multifunctional.

VAYU: Did you follow development of the Su-30MKI in India?

AK: Of course, we were particularly pleased on receiving information about the excellent performance of Indian pilots (flying Su-30MKIs) during international exercises. We in Russia were proud of the Su-30MKI's performance and have great respect for skills of IAF pilots, many of whom we knew personally. We understand how difficult it is to operate in foreign skies, over unknown terrain, in an unfamiliar