

The war in Russia was a struggle of unprecedented scale. The German army expected to win a sweeping victory in a few short months (some even said weeks). Yet, nearly four long years later, it met total defeat. For the Soviet forces to have accomplished such a feat, especially after the devastating effects of Stalin's military purge in the late thirties, is amazing by any standard. That they overcame all odds is due to many factors, some German, but many of them Soviet. Simply put, the Soviets quickly figured out they were fighting not only for their country but for their very survival as a people. Such dire consequences forced them into finding the best, most practical solution for any given problem and to continuously review their operations on all levels to insure that the right questions were being asked. Two years after that fateful morning of June 22, 1941, the Red Army was a very different creature from the one overrun by the German *blitzkrieg*.

By early 1943, the Germans were very different as well, having just lost the Sixth Army at Stalingrad. That the Nazi war machine was indeed vulnerable was a tremendous psychological victory for the Soviets and the world. Yet, the war was still far from over, and STAVKA, the high command of the Red Army, continued to seek ways to improve its forces. It recognized that one of the key factors in successfully fighting the Germans was neutralizing the Luftwaffe on its own terms. This required a nearly total restructuring of the *Voyenno Vozdushnye Sily* (VVS, or Soviet Air Force), both in its organizational framework and its tactical and strategic doctrines. General A. A. Novikov was just the person to do the job. A man of talent and energy, STAVKA made him VVS commander on April 11, 1942 after his effective and innovative use of airpower on the Leningrad front in March. Slowly the VVS was remolded by Novikov into a more proficient instrument for not only meeting

Kuban Bridgehead



DOWN IN FLAMES Campaign
for *The Rise of the Luftwaffe*



By Greg Leon Guerrero

the Luftwaffe, but also for supporting the ground forces. However, all these changes needed to stand a true test of combat, and while the final months of 1942 saw a VVS that was more aggressive, much work remained.

On February 4, 1943, a mere two days after the German surrender at Stalingrad, a Soviet assault group established a beachhead just southwest of the Black Sea port of Novorissisk. The Germans were caught off guard and Novorissisk was now in danger of being encircled. As this port anchored the southern flank of their bridgehead over the Kuban River they were immediately concerned. The Germans launched immediate local counterattacks, but the Soviet beachhead held, aided by the region's foothills and rugged terrain. Soon reinforcements in increasing numbers from both sides began to arrive at the sector, threatening to create a full-scale campaign.

The opportunity Novikov needed had arrived. Here, the VVS was to make the crucial transition from a defensive to an offensive posture, made possible by increased organizational expertise, the arrival of new equipment, emerging numerical superiority and the introduction of innovative and effective tactics.

The Kuban Bridgehead

The German-held Kuban bridgehead, situated along the Taman peninsula, was an area of extreme importance to both sides. The Germans saw the region as

essential to protecting the eastern approaches to the Crimea, whereas the Soviets viewed the bridgehead as a launch-point for another possible German offensive into the northern Caucasus. Unlike Stalingrad, Kursk or even Operation Bagration, the campaign is almost unknown in the West, probably due to the fact that there were no real breakthroughs on the ground, no encirclements, no capitulation of German armies. At best, it was a set of limited ground offensives during the boggy months of spring.

However, the air battles over the Kuban sector were pivotal to the growth of the VVS as the offensive long-arm of the Red Army, sending a clear message to the Luftwaffe: the VVS was about to return what it had received. In fact, Soviet historians hold this two-month air campaign in early 1943 to be as important to the war effort as the Americans do the battle of Midway. It was a battle fought with such intensity that General K. V. Vershinin, the main Soviet air commander of the sector, claimed on some days he could see an aircraft fall every ten minutes, and it was not unusual for as many as 100 air battles to take place in a day.

The German Fourth *Luftflotte* (Air Fleet), which included the elite Udet, Molders and Green Hearts JGs (*Jagdgeschwader*, equivalents of Groups), was responsible for this area, while its Soviet counterparts were primarily the Fourth and Fifth Air Armies, along with three air corps from STAVKA reserves. Both air forces were roughly equal in size at

Kuban Bridgehead: DOWN IN FLAMES Campaign

about 1000 combat aircraft each. The Luftwaffe fighter units were mainly equipped with Bf 109 G 2/-4's and Fw 190 A's, while the VVS possessed a mixture of the latest Yakovlev and Lavochkin fighters, along with large numbers of I1-2 Sturmoviks and Pe-2 bombers. In addition, there was a steady flow of lend-lease aircraft: P-39's, A-20's, P-40's and even Spitfire V's. Though Soviet pilots found the Spitfire a disappointment (it looked too much like a Bf 109 and was very vulnerable to groundfire), they flew the P-39 with great elan during the battle. In fact, two pilots of 16 GvIAP (*Gvardeiskii Istrebitel'nii Aviatsionnii Polk*, or Guards Fighter Air Regiment), A. I. Pokryshkin and his squadron mate G. A. Rechkalov, were very successful flying the P-39-the former claiming 20 kills during the battle.

Phase 1: Myskhako

The battle began April 17, 1943 when the German Seventeenth Army launched Operation Neptune, focused upon the Soviet beachhead at Myskhako. German Ju 87's tried to dislodge the Soviets and initially the divebombers were unopposed, but within three days VVS fighters arrived to stop the attacks. Though Soviet fighter pilots claimed 182 Luftwaffe aircraft destroyed in the following week, the losses were considerable for both sides. In the end, Soviet resistance was so stiff the Wehrmacht was forced to abandon its attack.

Phase 2: Krymskaya

The second phase of the battle began when the Soviet 56th Army launched a major ground offensive on April 29. The objective was to establish a breakthrough corridor to Anapa, a coastal town deep in the German rear on the Black Sea. The offensive began around the village of Krymskaya, which had great strategic value due to its position north of Novorossisk and close to a key railroad junction. By this time the VVS had

considerable numerical superiority, so much so that the Luftwaffe lost an average of 17 fighters a day up to May 10th; in total some 368 German aircraft were claimed by the VVS.

However, once again the Soviet air force was also paying a heavy price in aircraft losses, and by May 9 / 10 the Luftwaffe had actually regained air superiority over Krymskaya. After the Soviet 56th Army made only limited gains, a two-week lull ensued.

Phase 3: Blue Line

On May 26th, the Soviet offensive was renewed along the fortified German "Blue Line" with a powerful armored infantry thrust. Within hours of the Soviet assault, the Germans launched a determined counterattack that soon stalled the Soviet drive. As a result, more than 100 Soviet tanks were lost on the first day. In the air, the response from both sides was immediate and uncompromising. The VVS had launched a preparatory raid of 338 aircraft. The Germans responded with up to 1,500 sorties on the same day. German sources state that the VVS lost 350 combat aircraft on May 26th alone, but overall air losses to the Luftwaffe were so severe that they discontinued active air engagements in the area on June 7th. During this third phase of the campaign many reputations were made: the Glinka brothers, Dmitrii and Boris, scored 21 and 10 victories respectively in the Kuban, A. L. Prukozhnikov-20, V. I. Fadeyev-15, N. E. Lavitsky-15, D. I. Koval-13, V. I. Fedorenko-13 and P. M. Berestnev-12.

On July 5, 1943 German operation *Zitadelle* began, only to be called off by Hitler twelve days later after German forces suffered substantial losses in their advance. The Soviets quickly seized the initiative, beginning their counteroffensive just as the German offensive was stalling. This turn of events did not bode well for the Germans deployed in the Kuban Bridgehead, especially

after the Soviets occupied all land routes to the Crimea by October 13, 1943. That same month, the Kuban Bridgehead was evacuated by German forces.

VVS Kuban Aces

There were quite a few Soviet aces made during the Kuban air campaign, but I will focus on the following: Pokryshkin, D. B. Glinka, Rechkalov and Fadeyev.

Aleksandr Ivanovich Pokryshkin started the war as a Sr. Lieutenant and deputy squadron leader with the 55 IAP (*Istrebitel'nii Aviatsionnii Polk*, or Fighter Air Regiment). A man of great intelligence and a brilliant leader, Pokryshkin never stopped studying the enemy. He continually worked at finding tactical innovations. A pilot of uncanny ability, Pokryshkin perfected the high-speed surprise attack from above, and his motto was: "altitude, speed, maneuver, fire." He first flew the MiG-3, then the Yak-1 and finally the P 39, his favorite. By war's end, Pokryshkin was commander of the 9th GvIAD (*Gvardeiskaya Istrebitel'naya Aviatsionnaya Diviziya*, or Guards Fighter Air Division) and had amassed 59 air victories, placing him as the second highest Allied ace of WWII. He was also one of only three to have received the Gold Star of Hero of the Soviet Union three times during the war.

Dmitrii Borisovich Glinka began his career in January 1942, flying the Yak-1 with 45 IAP. By early 1943, Glinka's unit had completed their transition to the P-39. A pilot of great skill, Glinka achieved many of his air victories through surprise attacks while flying free hunts. He was also a man of tremendous constitution, having survived two severe crashes, one of which required two months of recovery. However, Glinka always returned, adding more air victories to his score. He went on to become a squadron leader and received the Gold Star of Hero of the Soviet Union twice. Glinka's final tally stood at 50 air victories.

(Continued on page 22)

by Rodger B. MacGowan



U.S.A.



U.K.



France



Poland



China



U.S.S.R.



Germany



Italy



Japan

Photocopy this page; add in the aircraft names and key historical information you want, then add in the aircraft factors/values; cut out the cards, paste them back to back — undamaged/damaged side — enjoy!

**Wingman
Fighter**

**Wingman
Fighter**

Fighter

Fighter

Bomber

Bomber

Bomber

Bomber



FROM THE DRAWING BOARD: How to Design Your Own Aircraft Cards for DiF Series

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Kuban Bridgehead: DOWN IN FLAMES Campaign

When the war started, **Grigori Andreyevich Rechkalov** was flying I-15 / 3's into the fray. His unit quickly converted to the I-16, and Rechkalov secured his first air victory with it—a Ju 88. However, not much later he sustained serious injuries to his head and right leg when German fighters bounced his formation during an escort mission. It took Rechkalov several months to recover, but upon return he quickly added three more victories to his score while flying the Yak-1. In April 1943, Rechkalov was transferred to the 16 GvIAP where he met the P-39. This was to become his favorite aircraft, having excellent qualities from low to medium altitude, as well as the devastating 37mm cannon. Rechkalov was one of the quickest and deadliest of aces, possessing superb pilot skills and outstanding marksmanship, coupled with a truly aggressive spirit. Unfortunately, his "lone wolf" tendencies made him a poor leader, and at times, a liability to his comrades in arms. Nonetheless, Rechkalov closed his score at 56 personal victories, placing him as the fourth-ranked Allied ace of WWII. He received the Gold Star of Hero of the Soviet Union twice.

Vadim Ivanovich Fadeyev was a brilliant ace, who like so very many others became a casualty of the war. His career began in July 1941, flying I-16's in the 446 SAP (*Smeshanii Aviatzionnii Polk*, or Mixed Air Regiment). In January 1942, Fadeyev opened his score when he downed a Bf 109. In late 1942, with six air victories, Fadeyev was posted to the 16 GvIAP, which had the more advanced Yak-1's. He was eventually promoted to squadron leader. In April 1943, Fadeyev's exploits with the P-39 began when the regiment commenced its transition to the Lend-Lease aircraft. Like many other prominent aces, he was a master of the surprise attack. Instead of turning with his foe, Fadeyev preferred to dive down upon them at full throttle, using his

excessive speed to regain a safe altitude. By early May, Fadeyev was running up his score (then at 19 victories) at a prodigious rate. This earned him a recommendation for the Gold Star. On May 5, 1943 Fadeyev was with five Airacobras when they engaged eight Bf 109s near Krymskaya. Though Fadeyev shot down two fighters, the wingman of his second victim in turn attacked him and Fadeyev fell from the sky. His final score stood at 21 air victories, just four short of his age. Fadeyev posthumously received the Gold Star of Hero of the Soviet Union.

Suggested Rules

The ace counters provided in this campaign insert should not be used as skilled pilots for any Soviet campaigns before this one. This is to reflect the

growing experience of the VVS during the war. It is strongly recommended that the Soviet player use the following rule by Scott Johnson for the 11-2 Sturmovik.

18.8: Air-to-Ground Rockets

18.8.1 Air-to-ground rockets are used to destroy ground targets during the strafing step of the turn. Place a Rockets counter on each aircraft equipped with air-to-ground rockets.

18.8.2 A fighter or light-bomber equipped with air-to-ground rockets may use those rockets to increase the amount of cards drawn during the strafing phase by three extra cards (along with the cards drawn for the aircraft's burst rating).

18.8.3 After the air-to-ground rocket strafing attacks are made, the rockets are expended and the Rockets counter is removed.

18.8.4 If an aircraft loaded with air-to-ground rockets becomes damaged it must jettison the rockets.

Team Tournament Format for *DOWN IN FLAMES*

1. This tournament is for **teams of two players**. Each team will compete with other two-person teams in a random round-robin format in three separate dogfights, each composed of six turns of combat, as in the *DOWN IN FLAMES* rules. All Dogfight rules from *DiF* apply, except as noted in #3 and #6 below.

2. At the conclusion of each dogfight, each team will score a number of Victory Points, as listed in *THE DOWN IN FLAMES* dogfight rules. Each team will then compare their VP score with that of their opponent to come up with a final comparative score for each dogfight.

Example: Team 1 scores 12 VPs against Team 2 in a single dogfight. Team 2's total is 7 VPs. The net VP scores that will be totaled for the tournament are +5 for Team 1, and -5 for team 2.

After all three dogfights are complete, each team's comparative VPs will be totaled. These totals should be entered on a Tournament Signup and Results sheet. After completion of all round-robin play, the team with the highest number of VPs is the winner of the tournament. Ties will be resolved by an additional face-to-face dogfight between the affected teams.

3. The tournament sponsors should predesignate the opposing aircraft for each of the three rounds of dogfights. For each matchup, the teams in a dogfight will flip a coin. The winner of

the flip gets to determine whether they want to choose their aircraft (from the two indicated sets) **or** choose to go first in the dogfight.

Dogfight Round #1

2 Elements of Bf.109 E's
vs. 2 Elements of Spitfire I's

Dogfight Round #2

1 Element of Bf.109 K's
and 1 Element of Bf.109 G's
*vs. 1 Element of P-47 D's
and 1 Element of P-38 I's*

Dogfight Round #3

1 Element of Bf.109 G's
and 1 Element of Fw.190 D's
*vs. 1 Element of P-51 D's
and 1 Element of Spitfire IX's*

4. Each person in a team will control one leader-wingman element from the allotted aircraft. Pilot counters are not used.

5. Important: Teammates may look at each other's cards and communicate during a dogfight **only during Dogfight Round #1**. (This is to help beginners get used to the game.) For the last two dogfights, teammates may not look at each other's cards and may not communicate during play, although friendly competitive banter with your opponents is allowed and encouraged.

6. For purposes of the tournament, Disengagement is **not allowed**. Each player must remain in the dogfight for its duration.

7

Kobra

Manufacturer: Bell (USA)
Service Dgn. Airacobra
Engine Rating 1,200 h.p.
Max. Speed 642 km/h
Max. Range 1,046 km

P-39N
Airacobra

Wingman
Fighter

1 Level
2 Offense
2 Defense

Bomb

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3

Dal'ny
(long-range)

Designer: Yakovlev
Service Dgn. Dal'ny
Engine Rating 1,360 h.p.
Max. Speed 602 km/h
Max. Range 1,400 km

Yak-9D
Ostronsy

Wingman
Fighter

Cannot Bomb
2 Offense
2 Defense

Bomb

RBM©2000

7

Kobra

Manufacturer: Bell (USA)
Service Dgn. Airacobra
Engine Rating 1,200 h.p.
Max. Speed 642 km/h
Max. Range 1,046 km

P-39N
Airacobra

1943
Fighter

1 Level
6 WWP
2 BS
2 HWP

Bomb

RBM©2000

3

Dal'ny
(long-range)

Designer: Yakovlev
Service Dgn. Dal'ny
Engine Rating 1,360 h.p.
Max. Speed 602 km/h
Max. Range 1,400 km

Yak-9D
Ostronsy

1943
Fighter

Cannot Bomb
7 WWP
0 BS
2 HWP

Bomb

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7

Kobra

Manufacturer: Bell (USA)
Service Dgn. Airacobra
Engine Rating 1,200 h.p.
Max. Speed 642 km/h
Max. Range 1,046 km

P-39N
Airacobra

Wingman
Fighter

1 Level
2 Offense
2 Defense

Bomb

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4

"PTA"
42547

1943
Fighter

Operational Career:
• 216.6th AD (fighter div.)
• 9.6th AD

Sorites: 450
Air Battles: 122
Total Kills: 61
Personal Vic: 56
Group Vic: 5
★ Age 2

GRIGORI ANDREICH
Rechkalov
b.1920

Hero of the Soviet Union
1943 1944

1 Level
6 WWP
2 BS
2 HWP

Bomb

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7

Kobra

Manufacturer: Bell (USA)
Service Dgn. Airacobra
Engine Rating 1,200 h.p.
Max. Speed 642 km/h
Max. Range 1,046 km

P-39N
Airacobra

1943
Fighter

1 Level
6 WWP
2 BS
2 HWP

Bomb

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4

"100"
29004

1943
Fighter

Commander:
• 16.6th AP (fighter regt.)
• 9.6th AD (fighter div.)

Sorites: 600
Air Battles: 156
Total Kills: 59
Personal Vic: 53
Group Vic: 6
★ Age 1

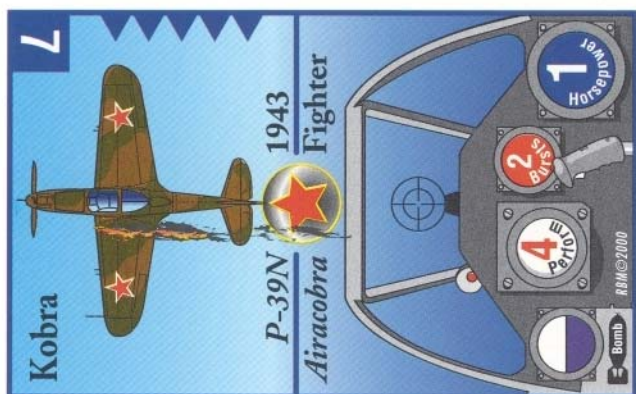
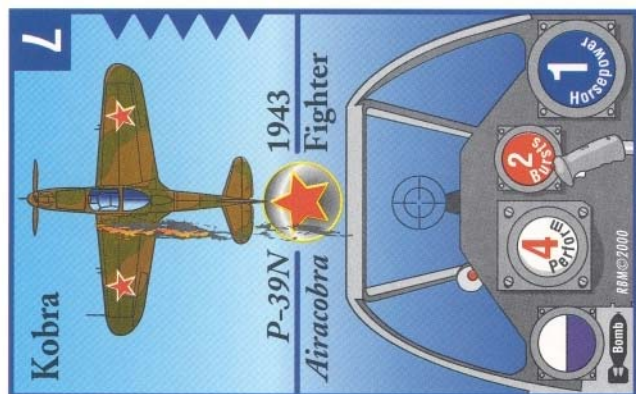
ALEXANDR IVANOVICH
Pokryshkin
b.1913-d.1985

Hero of the Soviet Union
1943 1943 1944

1 Level
6 WWP
2 BS
2 HWP

Bomb

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5



Designer Ilyushin
Crew Two
Engine Rating 1700 h.p.
Max. Speed 404 km/h
Max. Range 766 km

IL-2m
Wingman
Bomber
(Light)

Sturmovik

1 Level Bomb

1 **Offense**

2 **Defense**

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5



Designer Petyakov
Crew Three
Engine Rating 1100 h.p.
Max. Speed 540 km/h
Max. Range 1,500 km

Pe-2
Wingman
Bomber
(Light)

Peshka

2 D/L Bomb

1 **Offense**

3 **Defense**

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5



Designer Ilyushin
Crew Two
Engine Rating 1700 h.p.
Max. Speed 404 km/h
Max. Range 766 km

IL-2m
1942
Bomber
(Light)

Sturmovik

1 Level Bomb

4 **World Power**

1 **Survival**

2 **Hostage**

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5



Designer Petyakov
Crew Three
Engine Rating 1100 h.p.
Max. Speed 540 km/h
Max. Range 1,500 km

Pe-2
1941
Bomber
(Light)

Peshka

2 D/L Bomb

5 **World Power**

0 **Survival**

3 **Hostage**

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5



Designer Ilyushin
Crew Two
Engine Rating 1700 h.p.
Max. Speed 404 km/h
Max. Range 766 km

IL-2m
Wingman
Bomber
(Light)

Sturmovik

1 Level Bomb

1 **Offense**

2 **Defense**

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5



Designer Petyakov
Crew Three
Engine Rating 1100 h.p.
Max. Speed 540 km/h
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Pe-2
Wingman
Bomber
(Light)

Peshka

2 D/L Bomb

1 **Offense**

3 **Defense**

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5



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IL-2m
1942
Bomber
(Light)

Sturmovik

1 Level Bomb

4 **World Power**

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Engine Rating 1100 h.p.
Max. Speed 540 km/h
Max. Range 1,500 km

Pe-2
1941
Bomber
(Light)

Peshka

2 D/L Bomb


5 **World Power**

0 **Survival**

3 **Hostage**

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8



IL-2m
Sturmovik

1942
Bomber
(Light)

1 Jump
Horsesh

3 WPT
PERT


1 Buys
Buys

1 Buys
Buys

Bomb

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8



Pe-2
Pesbka

1941
Bomber
(Light)

2 Jump
Horsesh

4 WPT
PERT

0 Buys
Buys


1 Buys
Buys

1 D/L
D/L

Bomb

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8



IL-2m
Sturmovik

Wingman
Bomber
(Light)


1 Offense
Offense

1 Defense
Defense

Bomb

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8



Pe-2
Pesbka

Wingman
Bomber
(Light)

1 Offense
Offense


2 Defense
Defense

1 D/L
D/L

Bomb

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8



IL-2m
Sturmovik

1942
Bomber
(Light)

1 Jump
Horsesh

3 WPT
PERT


1 Buys
Buys

1 Buys
Buys

Bomb

RBM©2000

8



Pe-2
Pesbka

1941
Bomber
(Light)

2 Jump
Horsesh

4 WPT
PERT

0 Buys
Buys

1 Buys
Buys

1 D/L
D/L

Bomb

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8



IL-2m
Sturmovik

Wingman
Bomber
(Light)


1 Offense
Offense

1 Defense
Defense

Bomb

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8



Pe-2
Pesbka

Wingman
Bomber
(Light)

1 Offense
Offense

2 Defense
Defense

1 D/L
D/L

Bomb

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