

## INTERVIEW WITH GENERAL GARBUZ

INTERVIEWER: When you first arrived in Cuba, tell me what your impressions were of the country and of your mission to keep this deployment secret.

GG: First of all I would like to -taking advantage of the fact that I am seated here before your eyes -I would like to express to the comrades [the Americans], that even at a time when we were enemies, during the Cold War, I am sure that they, or most of them, just as most of us, wanted peace, wanted to avoid a nuclear war, especially since we Russians had recently gone through a major war -the Great Patriotic War against fascism -in which the great American nation also helped us.

And in answer to your direct question, well, I had a desire to help Cuba, a desire to help a small nation that had suddenly achieved independence, in fact an independence that was gained without the help of our communist ideas, but by these people's own struggle for freedom. We believed that we were being sent to lend assistance. All the more so since the facts that we had at hand, well, let's just say that we didn't pull them out of a hat. In 1961, there were the events at Playa F Giron. The facts that were at our disposal showed that a conspiracy was being formed against little Cuba. Since I ended up working with Khrushchev, and am one of four people who is still alive, - I'm one of the last people still alive who witnessed all the directives -whether or not I support the ideas, the rationale, and the arguments which guided our mission (of course we had to make a great deal of corrections) I would nonetheless like to complete my thought with this: that even though those comrades, or sirs, or gentlemen, strove to establish a peaceful resolution at a critical moment, I think that they served humankind in the same way I did. Though I was prepared to deflect any possible aggressive forces that they could have hidden.

INTERVIEWER: And what were the words and beliefs of Khrushchev that were influencing you?

GG: In the month of June, in mid-June, a group of generals and officers, who were appointed as deputy commanders of Soviet troops which were to be deployed in Cuba, were invited to the General Staff of the Ministry of Defense, where they were to acquaint themselves with the general outline of the operational strategy, with the details of this strategy, to express their opinions, to listen to others who wished to voice their proposals. This process of familiarization was kept secret and hidden. We could speak only with the head of the General Staff and with the head of Civil Defense, Marshal Zakharov, and with the Army General, Ivanov S.P. Questions arose, about this and that, they discussed various issues and adopted resolutions on some, decided upon further study for others, but everything was conducted in secret. And after a succession of these meetings -they went on for about a week- Marshal Zakharov said, "Rodion Yakovlevich will see you tomorrow at the last meeting ." We already knew that we were about to be sent to Cuba by plane. When we met the Minister, he greeted us and said that we already must have been given so much information we were pumped up like balloons. [60] "Nikita Sergeevich is awaiting us. Let's get in the car and go to see Khrushchev." That's how we ended up meeting Khrushchev. The Minister didn't take anyone else besides the four of us. I, for example, had been appointed the deputy commander of a group of Soviet troops specializing in military training. I became a member of the Council. My comrades who were there were also deputies in the Air Force, the Navy, and the Air Defense Force, -all four went. We entered Khrushchev's office and were told to take a seat

because Nikita Sergeevich would soon be here. Literally in one minute he walked in, I would say he somersaulted in. Then he wagged his head and began -and threw out -a sentence -"We in the Central Committee decided to slip America a hedgehog, to place missiles in Cuba to keep America from swallowing Cuba. We have Cuba's agreement. The missiles are the main thing." Then there followed a whole -it lasted about an hour -a whole policy for strategic deployment by the head of state before us military representatives. He imparted great significance to the secrecy of the deployment. For example, he asked my comrade, General Dementiev -"What do you think, General, is it possible to deploy a group of missiles in secrecy?" The General thought for a moment and replied, "No, it is not possible." "Why?" The General explained why it was impossible in clear, concise, and concrete terms. Then he [Khrushchev] said, "Well, Rodion Yakovlevich, we must think about this from the point of view of guaranteeing secrecy." And an idea emerged quite quickly: to deploy missiles, uh -to deploy troops throughout Cuba. This idea underwent some modifications. First of all, the missiles would not be deployed initially, but would be preceded by Air Defense Force detachments, ground troops, etc.

The second question had to do with the commander. When we went to the meeting with Khrushchev, we knew that General Dankevich should be the commander, since he commanded the Army. And over this Army was the General Staff, with its entire weight centered on this group. Finally, there were significant facts. Well, Nikita Sergeevich asked, "tell me your thoughts on this matter." The latter responded. He [Khrushchev] said softly, "This is all very good, but please do not feel offended." The latter [Dankevich] immediately understood that the conversation concerned his appointment. He replied, "I am not offended. I understand." What did that mean for us, who were sitting there? For us it meant the following: It was thought, and later it became known that the commander was replaced specifically to keep them [the Americans] from immediately suspecting that missiles were being deployed. They replaced him [Dankevich] with someone who wasn't involved with the Air Force, Pliiev. We realized that Khrushchev chose a different commander because he knew that there could be some critical moments during the deployment of detachments, when it would be necessary to stand up for ourselves, to defend the right to deploy missiles there. And because of this, we went ahead with a new commander. He [Pliiev] wasn't present at that meeting, but his appointment was confirmed as we spoke. We left for the airport -that was on the 7th -and waited for him, for Army General Pliiev. There we greeted him and flew through Africa. It was our first meeting with him. For me it was a pleasant meeting, because during the war, I had commanded an anti-tank regiment that backed up his corps, and during the liberation of Odessa, we earned distinction, and he presented the regiment that I commanded with a special medal. Conversation was kept to a minimum, because we were going along the road leading to Kanafy (?), where you don't do a lot of talking. Yet he became acquainted with each one of us, and we with him through our work. But we knew that it was a very tense time, that we might have to fight, that we had to remain steadfast. We knew we had to do our best to carry out the task given to us by the government. On the next day -we spent a bit of time in Kanafy -on the next day, we flew to Havana. We had our first meeting, then spent the night there. The morning of the next day I asked the commander to let me drive down and look at Havana's various exit points. I took about 20 men with me, so they'd have a good look. He gave us permission but asked us to return by 6pm. I agreed. By ten to six, we had driven around Havana and had a good look at all the roads and highways. We drove back at ten of six, and soldiers ran to greet us. They told us, "They're waiting for you. Fidel has

come to meet you." That's how we met Fidel Castro for the first time – it was on the 13th. Then the military work began, because a reconnaissance crew arrived on the first flight under the direction of Pliyev. Their task was to select areas for positioning the equipment, the missiles, the Air Defense Force, the tanks for the general armed units, in order to deploy them as quickly as possible. They also received shipments of equipment arriving in Cuba. Suffice it to say that a colossal amount of equipment poured into Cuba. 21,000 boxcars full of supplies were sent from the Soviet Union to Cuba in a very short period of time.

Then the usual army preparation began. As our main force we called in a missile division -the R-12 and R-14 missile divisions. The commander of the division was Statyenko who was my subordinate. Together we drove and flew all around Cuba to establish strategic locations. I still have a map of these areas. The assignment was quite difficult, because Marshall Biryuzov, at the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet gave the following evaluation: that this was a golden country, that you could sleep under every bush, that concealing the missiles would not require much work. I returned from Cuba in January in 1963, I had a conversation with the Marshal addressing the fact that he had been mistaken in this regard, that in fact we had to overcome great difficulties in situating the missiles. By the way, Fidel and Mikoyan did not share this point of view [that it would be difficult]. We were just lucky in finding locations for the missiles -we were able to situate them, so that by 14, ... August, August, we were able to bring in the first missiles. Kennedy discovered them only on the 16th. In a month we had already moved them to a new location. We replaced them. We understood that it was impossible to keep them concealed. That's why we changed the principles of concealment. The main principle was to create the illusion of operational preparedness. Whether we were ready or not, whether the launchers were in place or not, whether the missiles had their nuclear warheads in place or not, whether our people were ready or not, whether there was fuel or not, or maybe they were in an entirely different place. Suffice it to say that we had to select 40 positions for the missiles, for both launchers and missiles.

We selected -among the military locations -sixteen false sites, which operated like the military ones and were indistinguishable. Only if you were to study them systematically could you discover that they were fake. Besides which, we brought in six mobile missiles, which could be moved anywhere. Today the missile would be in one location they'd even expose it deliberately to reveal a little bit -and the next day they'd remove it -let them look for So here's a kind of sketch I took from a magazine that could show you all this and that you could film.

INTERVIEWER: At the time of the American discovery of the missiles, can you tell me exactly what was already in place in Cuba, how many launchers, how many warheads, etc.? .. in a way that Americans can understand, not technical descriptions.

GG: What can I say – I counted every missile, I knew of every missile, and was responsible for them. There should have been 40 launchers and 60 missiles. Why 60 and 40? - Because some sites called for repeated launchings. But the blockade led us to make corrections, and we brought and deployed only R-12 missiles. We had three regiments of loaded missiles -24 loaded missiles and 12, that means a total of 36 missiles, with 6 training missiles, to make a total of 42 missiles. They were powerful missiles. In

1960, as member of a governmental commission, I conducted nuclear tests of these missiles. Each warhead represented one megaton, that is, 50 Hiroshimas. It's a terrible force, of course.

INTERVIEWER: What cities in the United States could they reach?

GG: First, I think that if there was some kind of missile base in Oklahoma, it would be within reach. Personally, we didn't know which cities and what areas were targeted. But undoubtedly military-industrial bases were targeted, just as 174 [American] missiles were targeted on cities near Moscow, etc. So that here, as they say, we've got to look the truth in the face They were targeted, but God forbid they ever be launched. Thank God that both heads of state felt an obligation before their ancestors. I bow before the son of the great American people, John Kennedy. I am very sorry that his fate took such a bad turn. But when I compare John, now that I've matured a bit through the years, when I evaluate that period of time, all the same I find that various hawks had a greater influence on Kennedy, and that he was receptive to them. Then his wisdom led him to the right actions in the end. His advisers who told him to launch a nuclear strike and surround the place -if one of you were to take note of what we, the Soviets, were saying, I would be surprised to hear such words. After the war, after the crisis, I met with all the Marshals -Krylov and Grechko gave reports. No one used such words or voiced a desire to launch a strike. That wasn't the case.

Interviewer: And what about the R-14 s? Were they in Cuba?

GG: No. The R-14s didn't get there. When the naval blockade went into force, they waited to decide whether to turn back or not. They turned back. That was a decision of the Presidium of the Central Committee of the Party not to raise the ante, and to bring them back. Four ships remained because they were necessary for the R-12s.

INTERVIEWER: How did you find out about the decision that those ships...

GG: The warheads were in, but not the missiles themselves. And there was none of the necessary equipment. A single battery arrived by chance, but it was only one. We deployed it in the region of Santa Clara, Escambraja -to make the Americans think that we were fully equipped. We also created a false site on the Espiron. And I think that it worked rather well .At least in the press there appeared -I noticed at the time that photos appeared claiming that these were missiles, when in fact, they were just parts of the Air Defense Force. We were able to conceal the parts for the missiles in various hiding places among the mountains, to keep planes from discovering them right away. Later they might discover them, but we'd hide them again in another place. This kind of work is a creative process ,as they say, and a difficult one, but misfortune teaches you.

INTERVIEWER: And so, .... with the different descriptions, I don't understand. Is it possible to say exactly how many warheads altogether were already in Cuba when the Americans discovered the missiles?

GG: Altogether, both big and little ones, there were -though this number is not published anywhere, but since 25 years have gone by we can say it -183 nuclear warheads .This includes the Luna, FKR-I , atom bombs for the R-12 and R-14.

INTERVIEWER: Explain to me what an FKR is and how many there were, and how they would have been used.

GG : FKR stands for "Frontovaia Krylataia Raketa," which is a Front-Line Cruise Missile, a tactical, short-range missile meant for use against enemy landing troops (paratroopers). Its top range was 180 kilometers. It can carry both a conventional and a nuclear warhead of 80 kilotons. These missiles can be launched against amphibious landing ships.

INTERVIEWER ~ So the Lunas and FKRs would have been used against -and could have been used - against an invading force.

GG: Except for one "but." Any use [of the missiles] is out of the question, they say in some of the press - and some of our press repeats this. When Nikita Sergeevich established his mission, he said that nuclear means could be employed only by his authority, only by directive from Moscow. Even the small missiles - they seemed small - in Cuba. No. You needed..., only the government could decide upon any anti-invasion operation. Secondly. They would decide whether to go into battle with or without nuclear warheads. If they decide to go without them, it's as if you're fighting with fists, and you launch a retaliatory strike all the same, but it's not nuclear. There was no nuclear element. I'd like to tell you even more. If McNamara were here, I would tell him that Khrushchev even had a special team to forbid the use of nuclear weapons. Even in the event of an attack by you -who would argue against launching a counter-attack? -Nikita Sergeevich gave the order to forbid [the use of nuclear weapons]. That's the truth. They still don't know. And recently there was a conference at which some people were saying that we gave the go-ahead for the use of nuclear weapons, but nothing of the kind took place. I can bring -I remember it by heart, because I answered that for the correct use....here... [shuffling through some papers], so there won't be any mistake. I want what I remember -in connection with the possibility -on the 22nd, at 11:30pm, the Minister issued an order that American forces conducting exercises were preparing to attack, that in connection with the possibility of an amphibious attack on the island of Cuba by Americans involved in these exercises, we were to adopt rapid measures to raise our military preparedness and to repel the enemy using the combined forces of the Cuban Army and all Soviet troop forces, excluding the use of nuclear weapons. That is what it says in layman's terms. That is, we could launch a military operation, but without the use of nuclear weapons. That was generous. That was dated the 22nd, when the blockade was in. Three days later, we discussed it once again, how to operate in these circumstances, especially since we received information that an invasion of Cuba was to take place around the 26th or 27th. This was rather reliable information. We had some very strong indications. But they again told us, "You don't need any indications about repelling the aggression. With our decoding - which I ordered -we have confidence in your courage and organization and in the destruction of the aggressor in case of an attack on the 25th. Finally, the situation became even more critical, rife with uncertainty. The Americans brought in the Air Force, Congress gave the go-ahead to call in 175,000 soldiers in Florida. It seemed that we and our country should raise our preparedness in this regard, so as not to be at a disadvantage. We were told that the use of nuclear warheads on FKR and Luna missiles or on planes without Moscow's approval is forbidden. That is, when Khrushchev spoke before a session of the Supreme Soviet, in January, or December, he said the following: we sent soldiers to defend Cuba

during a difficult time, we ordered them to stand firm and be prepared to die if necessary. That's how we carried out our orders.

That's my answer to your question. It can't be conveyed in a few words or phrases, it's an entire lifetime, a whole series of events. For me, since I saw things from the military point of view, for me they carried out the commander's orders which were meant to ensure on the one hand that we would be prepared for a retaliatory strike if necessary, and on the other hand, to ensure that an accidental launch would not be provoked. There's always some kind of idiot who won't follow orders but will do something else.

END OF SIDE 1

INTERVIEWER: As the weeks went on, tell me how the level of tension increased. Tell me about the American overflights, etc.

GG: Well I am a dyed-in-the-wool military man, and for me, for example, the build-up of military forces in the end either results in an attack or a strike, with a specific outcome. For example, if I drove into Havana I could see that five kilometers into the neutral maritime zone were American ships with radio antennas directed at every house. If I drove by Guantanamo Bay, I could see planes landing, soldiers being brought in, evacuating families and bringing in tanks; it was quite clear why they were doing all this in Guantanamo. Well, and the most important element was the use of aerial squadrons. What for? Against little Cuba -which had a total of 30 of its own planes, and we brought in 33 -were concentrated around 2,000 planes. What for? Why was everything undertaken with such thoroughness that Kennedy requested an examination of it? You see, there are certain norms set, for governmental purposes. Especially since Fidel announced, and our advisers did too, that we should not be barred from anything. "If planes attack they should be met with fire. Why be forced into a compromise?", they said, "confront them."

However, there was clearly a total disregard for these norms. Take, for example, the ships that approached Cuba. There were over 500 overflights. On this point I know that, since I myself was involved in taking out the equipment, that Nikita Sergeevich ordered every ship to be armed with heavy machine guns and in case of attack to open fire. Basically we'd meet action with fire. It was to be considered an attack on a Soviet ship. There were 500 incidents. This kind of direct involvement imposed a rather nervous mood on us in Cuba. Or, for example, we did everything possible to conceal things from the Americans and we wouldn't touch anything. [Translator's note: For some reason, this section was particularly difficult to decipher. It didn't seem to make sense. A native speaker should probably listen to it]. First of all, we determined a purely military approach (?) [3.50]. Then to square with things and immediately start fighting, we had to prepare for a major endeavor -we'd destroy one target here, a second one there, and a third one. But we concealed our intelligence operations. We kept them hidden more than anything. And the Americans never discovered 13 of our posts. What would it have meant if you had launched an aggression, if a direct strike were made? On the 28th, finally on the 29th -Kennedy didn't give his approval until the end. That would have meant in that you would lose 350 planes. Think about it. And at the same time, about, and still asking ourselves, about two overflights. I have a here from a soldier who at the Lenin Pass remembers how a plane flying over a ship into the

water. And we can this now because these facts -it was the 13th of -were all in Moscow. The most interesting thing is that this same thing I did. Who sent [the pilot of the downed plane], why did he die and for what cause did he die. So that someone could seize power. In general, take some numbers and it will shed new light on the Cuban Missile crisis, not perhaps on a major scale, but about how many Americans died, for one reason or another. I can say that there's nothing better than life. Sixty-four men died. Five died during the xxx on the [battleship] "Oregon," saving people and animals. They were buried in Havana, they found their place. But they died. Id they hadn't been there they wouldn't have died. That's the thing.

INTERVIEWER: Can you describe to me how low the planes actually flew?

GG: I lay together with my comrades, pressing ourselves against the Cuban soil, and thinking, how can we keep them from flying? And the simplest thing would be to shoot them down. It would simply be easier. But for two reasons we did not do this. For one thing, they still hadn't opened fire. From a military point of view they were still hiding everything, and we had the right to deal with them as enemies who violated specific laws. But we didn't do that either. We didn't do that for two reasons. For one thing we weren't fully prepared and we had to conceal certain movements. We didn't want to antagonize the enemy. For example, on the 26th, I would say that this was when the commander's patience ended, or almost ended. On the 26th, he gathered together the head of the Air Defense Force, General Grechko, myself, the Director of Staff, and we sat down to discuss what they [the Americans] had uncovered and what they hadn't, what we'd have to do to remove the things, because tomorrow they could be fired upon and we'd have to decide what to remove and what to replace. And we reported to Moscow -I wrote it with my own hand rather quickly -that our opponent had managed to uncover some strategic areas. In addition, [our communications] had been intercepted. Only now in our press, whether it's correct or not, are they relating the fact that the commander of the strategic air command mistakenly gave an order on the 24th that the missile installations should be placed on a higher alert level; if they all were at the third alert level, he ordered that they be raised to the second level. Basically the next level would be nuclear war. We simply knew about this order and communicated it to Moscow. How it influenced Khrushchev, it seemed to increase the pressure to hasten the retreat and to evaluate the facts in order to find a path to a peaceful resolution, because things had come to a head, as McNamara had said, the snow-white horse (?), pushing ahead for more and more, and things could have folded.

INTERVIEWER: And what did you hear back from Moscow when you wrote to them and said that the Americans understood where you are, when you essentially said, "We are becoming more and more vulnerable from a military point of view?"

GG: We received various responses. They mainly focused on maintaining our readiness for battle, on strengthening our readiness, on account of the discoveries of the engineers' work, they told us not to place the missiles in a vertical position, there were even some important commands. For example, to stop providing technical maintenance to the installations, since the U.N.... There was a certain period when Kennedy said, "Listen, if you wanted us to believe you, then have your engineers working." We carried this out, that is, we conceded on this point. But the main tendency [of the responses we

received] was not a question of belief, but do this, do that, and don't you slip up. For example, our nuclear warheads were located far from the missiles. The commander allowed them to be moved closer. And we were in this regard extraordinarily careful, and if the Americans exposed our intelligence operations or agents, it could be interpreted as a provocation. Then higher command could order us to strike as quickly as possible. That 's why everything was conducted with such care.

INTERVIEWER: And so the warheads, on the 25th or 26th, the warheads were brought to the sites where the launchers were.

GG: Not quite. We were at the fourth alert level which was established by law. This meant that the warhead was placed in the area of the installations and was ready to be assembled. It would be located in a special vehicle that we had, or a special container which was made. If the command were issued to move to level three, they would be assembled if there was no command, we had no right to do so.

INTERVIEWER: And did it ever go to alert number three during the crisis?

GG: No. No. I underline this for Gorbachev and for Khrushchev. Although what Khrushchev instructed us to do is not recorded anywhere, nonetheless in the directive which the group of troops received there appeared the declaration that besides Khrushchev -to change the order concerning the alert levels, besides him no one could, besides Moscow no one could. That's why those figures who now are trying to say, look, at the time of my departure, the Minister called me in and said, tell Pliiev that in case of an attack by the Americans, if he is unable to get through to us, if there are poor communications, then he can make such decisions himself, that, I have to say that this wasn't the case.

INTERVIEWER: And when we met each other the last time, you told me that during this period of time, with the American planes coming in, Fidel was getting, Fidel was mad because you weren't taking any action. Tell me about that and what he said and what he would say to all of you.

GG: No, it's not true that he had no reaction. He had a reaction, the reaction of defending his priorities, his government. And we communicated with him about this. Well, for example, at the particularly critical stage, two divisions of the air defense force, that's 144 launchers, 576 missiles, were readied to a six-minute alert level. That is, if the order were given, the missiles would go off, the plane would be hit, it would definitely be hit. So there was such an order. But it's another thing that there was such a sense of necessity, of crisis, weighing upon the commanders. (?) On the 26th, he'd give an order, the commander. For example, to undertake anti-aircraft intelligence measures at 8:34pm. They were measures involving the infantry -to put the infantry into action, to fire at planes without warning. In this regard, it was rather.... Though it's true, in his last correspondence, he scolds even our side and says, "you shot down a plane...Nikita accuses Fidel that before he didn't shoot down any planes and now he's downing them." An unfortunate misprint occurred to the effect that Fidel didn't know that we had reported it, and that Khrushchev had read it. There's no documentation, but I answer for my comrade, he's no longer alive, we wrote it together. An answer was sent by telegram the next day. "We consider that you were a bit hasty; we have set the course for a settlement. But we can say in all human decency that we live in Havana and we know what you're doing. On the 26<sup>th</sup>, we wrote: "we are shooting downplanes and we will continue downing planes," that Fidel had already given the command to shoot



down planes. We had to have the sense of self-respect, although you yourself understand, self-respect or no self-respect, a war is going on, and you must find a means to maintain your sanity, not to join the call for more, more, more.

INTERVIEWER: And you told me that Fidel would say to you, "the Americans are sneezing at you just like they're sneezing at us with these overflights," that you were making him more and more upset that you couldn't shoot.

GG: No, he didn't say so directly. He expressed the desire, and gave the order, but the thing is that we still didn't have adequate means of technical intelligence. We didn't make a conscious effort until the last minute. If we had acted sooner, we might shot down five or we might have downed ten planes, but not 270 if there had been an attack of a thousand [planes]. But the Americans had...we believed that in the first wave they'd have 1,200 [planes]. I know what a bomb attack means. And....there was a bomb attack with 1,500 to 2,000 planes in Stalingrad, and there were 1,200 planes at the battle of xxxx. However, the Americans preferred not to land troops, but to launch bomb attacks, because there are fewer losses. Because the Cuban people were united, and we ourselves were with them, we shouldn't be wrongfully accused. We were loyal to our soldier's duty. But we may now to ask, in order to remove elements of, well, accusation, that I now hear. But who will answer for the 570 planes in those ten or twelve days. Among them more than a hundred were at low altitudes. Who will answer for that? Why must the Russians answer for them, and not the Americans, who sent these planes and with specific goals, for intelligence, preliminary intelligence. And then I saw that they had worked out military goals, the so-called compromise bombing (?). They'd approach in a neutral zone, without touching anything, then suddenly they'd lunge towards the target, reach the target, drop a bomb, and immediately vanish upwards. These were supersonic planes. A Cuban couldn't hear them; by the time he'd turn his head the plane would already be gone. If we had adopted the decision to shoot at these planes, then we would have met them within 20 or 15 kilometers of their approach on Cuba. No one would have said..., though it's true this would have meant going into neutral zones which is forbidden, but if they were to bomb....

INTERVIEWER: I don't think there's going to be a whole lot of use to this. I don't know what it is. It seems to be confusing many issues.

GG: For example, two days ago...(mumbling, background talk). A soldier thinks better than I do, that's why...(background talk). I already told you that there were over 500 cases of overflights over the ships. Moreover, these were at dangerous and critical altitudes. And the "Lenin Komsomol," -by the way, that was the regiment that shot down the U-2, you see how fate works -and during its overflight another American pilot perished. And it was also the ship that recorded that five people perished during the Uragana Flory (?). So listen, briefly, simply. This shows what a living person was thinking, you understand. "U.S. planes perished on September 12, 1962," recounts the younger sergeant, Mitriev, who was also the section commander of the 507th regiment of the Air Defense Force (the regiment that downed the U-2):

In the evening I was standing watch on the starboard side. Our turbine-carrier, the 'Lenin Komsomol,' was moving quickly on a south westerly course. We were told that tomorrow we'd

be within sight of the shores of the island of Cuba. We had traveled many days on the seas and oceans. On August 28th, we arrived in Fedosin. The sun rapidly sank into the water and everything around us became dark. The stars appeared; the ocean's surface turned black. I became lost in thought and then gave a start; I heard a noise. A U-2 plane was flying. I immediately recorded this, in detail. Within a minute the black shadow of the plane flew over us. By the lights I could see that the plane had turned around; it was coming full circle. It began approaching the stem of the ship. What is it doing?, I thought. All the same, it's impossible to photograph it. It's dark. But the green and red lights were aimed directly at me. The plane descended as if it were about to cut into the ship. That was essentially what happened. A few moments later, the plane noisily flew right besides me on the port side. I even stepped back and sat down. I could see that not far away, right near the bow of the ship, the plane cut into the black waters. The water exploded, boiled, rose upward -and when the wave fell, the plane was already gone. That's what you dogs deserved,' I thought. I sighed with relief. The danger had passed.

But what was this? In the captain's cabin things started hopping, orders were given. I immediately noticed that the ship suddenly began to slow its course. Then the 'Leninsky Komsomol' began to turn around at its slowest speed. The commander gave the order to beef up the watch on the water's surface. When the pilots come up swimming, we'll take them aboard. We'll save them, he said. During those few moments I also passionately hoped that the pilots would show up, although I was still shuddering from the shock I had received. A feeling of hatred arose alongside a sense of pity. The enemy no longer presented a danger. The pilots became simple people who had suffered misfortune. We made another round. The ship slowed its speed entirely, and the siren went off. It was all in vain. The ocean had swallowed up these watchmen of the blockade. And certainly they weren't ready, not that day or any other day, to die. The captain gave the order to continue on course, but in my thoughts I kept returning to the plane that had just perished. I thought, 'who sent him to his death. He undoubtedly had children at home, and left behind a mother and family. Now the children will never see their papa return home. Why did this happen?' Yes. I felt truly sorry for them. They're people all the same, even if they're unbridled imperialists. (Some umming and uhing).

On the 12th, this is what happened. On September 12th, at 4:00 Moscow time (by the chronology we must determine which plane it was) the ship, "Lenin Komsomol," experienced overflights by two planes as it approached Port Nicara (?). This was recorded by the captain. As we were putting into port, a plane crashed into the water at 150 meters from the ship and drowned. The 'Lenin Komsomol' docked at the appointed port.

This is from the records of the ship's captain. In September of 1962, we, the group of troops, noted that 50 overflights were recorded by 15 Soviet ships that were posted near Cuba. The overflights were carried out at critically dangerous altitudes, at 50 to 100 meters. A memo on this was sent on September 14th from the Minister of Defense to Khrushchev, with a proposal to arm 34 ships, and to equip them with .23 calibre weapons, and a reserve of ammunition for two "bulls" (anti-aircraft guns?), or 1,200 pieces. On September 17th, Khrushchev confirmed the proposal of the Minister of Defense; instructions

were drawn up, which Khrushchev and the Minister of the Navy, Bakaev, confirmed. According to these instructions, the captain...

In these instructions to the captain of the ship and to the head of the echelon, it said that an open attack on the ships by foreign planes, or warships, should be considered as an aggressive action against the Soviet Union. If the ships were fired upon, it was permitted to use weapons and to retaliate. But you understand, there would be too many incidents. Should they open fire or not? That is, it would be endless, those events would lead to a blockade or a war, that's why our government was against it. Well, I won't be long. If you want to include this: This is captain Grichannik, the very same captain whose unit shot the plane down. His thoughts before the fight, as a person, are very interesting. What is this war for, who needs it, and why we, the soldiers, should die? That is, I want to say, that all of us should once again, say, kneel before the victims of Hiroshima and Nagasaki and pray for them, and maybe we would be closer those terrible events... And the Caribbean crisis was very close to it.. But we are looking for the guilty. No, we should make it so that this would never happen again. You know, that, thank God, these missiles don't exist any more. We have a new treaty. But a lot of people still want to keep nuclear weapons...

[How close did we come to nuclear war?]

I don't think that there would have been a nuclear war. And I will tell you why. First of all, all the power was concentrated in America. America could reach the Soviet Union. But the Soviet Union could not reach America. By the time of the crisis, there were only 6 or 16 missiles that could reach America from the territory of the Soviet Union. And the Americans had 174 missiles. But we had 420 medium-range missiles that could reach the missiles in Italy, Turkey, Turkey, Germany. 420 1-megaton missiles. That is why we had them by the throat. It's not by chance that during the debate in the White House about the reasons why we deployed our missiles on Cuba...everybody thought...most of the Americans thought that the reason was not to defend Cuba, but because they wanted to press to free Berlin. But I, being a missile person, nobody asked me about anything, and I didn't say anything, but Khrushchev wasn't going to achieve military parity because Cuba was not suitable for a base. Because a missile put 5 minutes from Florida would be immediately discovered. As soon as they found out about it..it won't be permitted to be used That's why Nikita's goal was to bully them. Risky? It depends how you consider it. Was it justified or not? From the point of view of common sense, of course, you can't play such jokes. But we have to establish the measure of the threat, the measure of the threat. The Americans...see, I am beginning to talk about politics, although I don't want to...it's the matter of one's conscience. At least both Salinger and MacNamara say now that the actions that took place could only be regarded as negative by both the Russians and the Cubans. And why wouldn't you say something like this now? Both of us witnessed the victory over fascism. We could celebrate it together. I remember our joy when the Americans opened the second front during the Great Patriotic War, when they landed in Normandy. Or when we helped them...we fought together. The Americans lost in the battle of Ardennes, and the Germans sent their most mobilized troops against us.. They were on their last breath, it was their last attack, and it was our last defensive operation. These were the most difficult battles at the end of war, and no one wanted to die, having gone through the war...

There was a report on this matter, I witnessed these events, because on October 26, when the commander made the decision, and we were ordered at 20:34 on that day to shoot, without warning, the planes that crossed the border, without warning. There was an order to engage all the technical means of reconnaissance. All our posts began to do that. And at 9 a.m. they discovered the first plane, they tracked it successively for an hour. The order was to watch target 33, as they called it, and the anti-aircraft units were tracking it. Every division noted how this target was going. I came to the command center at about 10 a.m. and Grechko told me that we had a guest. I asked him what they had been doing about it. He said that they can't report about it to the chief commander because he was sick. But we still had to shoot it down. We had to shoot it down because the situation was...nuclear weapons were being transported, and they could see them. Secondly, the fuel was being transported, and they could see it. And the Americans by that time had become used to the fact that they could fly unpunished, so we were forced to make a warning...that we could even go that far. But we understood that it was dangerous, too. If we shot down an American plane, they could retaliate in revenge. By the way, Khrushchev sent us such a telegram, and we began acting accordingly. But in a day, we received a completely different telegram. He said that we did the right thing, and it was good that everything ended the way it did. Yes, it was risky, but it was the kind of risk that you expect during a battle. And we have to ask, and if this is true ...Robert [Kennedy] asked his brother, "Why did you send those planes in the first place?" But this is how it happened...

But another American plane that was sent to Siverskoye and John Kennedy apologized. But why didn't our president apologize? I think it would be a good idea. Personally I would like to express condolences to the families of those who were killed. To their parents and families. They could have been alive now. They could have been happy. I saw his documents, they are in the archives now. His notebook, his ID. I think we could give them back. Why do we need them for? And if you submit an application. That's why I want so much to ask Mr. MacNamara, soldier to soldier...Mr. MacNamara. When there was the conference in Moscow, I studied the 160 questions that were posed by the Americans to Alexeev, Volkogonov, Gribkov. And I said, "Ask just two questions. One to Dobrynin. I declare that he didn't know all the plans. (And that proved to be true.) The other question to Mr. MacNamara. Let him evaluate the readiness. And I would like to ask him now as a very respected person and as a soldier. Why would I like to ask him this question? Because his answer would help me clarify a lot of things that are still unclear. Yes, there were plans, but they weren't approved by Kennedy, and so they aren't plans. But if Mr. MacNamara shows me the target, it means that they would have been destroyed...and we can't...it means that it is the truth. That's why they consciously didn't want to allow yet another pretence for war. Even if it's a conventional war, not a nuclear war, it's still a war. But it looks like I will never receive answers to these questions. Maybe you'll tell him that there is such a general here. Of course, he is older than me...

[an attempted question]

But I respect Robert MacNamara and other people who never even once during those events said anything. Of course, MacNamara ordered that four squadrons of planes be ready for bombing, but anyone in his place would have given the same order. It doesn't mean anything...

[U-2 had photographed much of your installations before you shot it down?]

Absolutely, they photographed the missiles. There was this mountain where the missiles were... He was about to fly away. The radar man said he would go back to Guantanamo in five minutes. And Grechko said, "I made a decision to shoot him down." But we both were responsible. Although, the chief commander didn't criticize us. The situation was very tense. We have to look at it not only from the point of view that a person was killed. From this point of view, of course, there is no justification for this. But from the point of view of the general situation at war, it means that this U-2 plane...those planes that were crawling all over the territory were not a threat to us. They could discover one or two installations, they could see where there were people and where there were no people. And was not a threat. But this U-2 plane could photograph all of Cuba. It could see what was where, in which place. This was a threat. It means we would give the military and the political commanders all our plans. It's not by chance that the flights of the planes were sanctioned by the president.

SIDE THREE [the flip side of another interview]

[When they shot down the U2, was that against orders?]

Everything was done only by order. You have to note that the government makes decision to start military operations. I read you the decision. The second thing...when the question of how to act, with nuclear weapons or conventional weapons, was decided. There is a written document, too. That is, we acted by orders. But within their authorities, the commander could make the decision as far as his troops go. Lieutenant-General Pliiev had the authority to do that. And he acted within the limits of his authorities. If there hadn't been a command to act, he would have exceeded his authorities. Because the government hadn't given the order to act. But such an order was given, and not only to us, but together with the Cubans. Had there been some aggression against Cuba, we were to be ready to fight back and not to allow the occupation of the island. Jurists still have a lot to study as far as those events go...

[And after you'd shot the U2 down, did you spend the next day and night expecting some sort of American attack?]

There were such worries.. I can't deny that. But common sense...and the comparison of our actions with the actions by the Americans...it was incompatible...for example, 500 planes, 60 violations, a lot of warnings from Fidel. That is, there wasn't such an acute feeling, but we had an order to be ready to fight, to intensify preparatory operations, the weapons, the roads for counter-attack together with the Cubans, if a landing were to happen. But we didn't particular worry about landings, we knew that the Americans, having an air force, would first flatten the land and only then would send in their people.

[How many Soviet lives would have been lost?]

I think that this would have been, realistically, our 170 ships, the 6 divisions of our first echelon...and, most important, the first, the second and maybe even the third wave of air attacks and bombings. Both Robert Kennedy and MacNamara, I think, said that there were almost 2000 planes. They wouldn't have been used all at once. Let's say that 1000 would have been used in the first wave, and maybe 1200 in the second wave of attacks, in order to avoid overlaps. It's terrible to even think of. Of course, we had shelters. I demanded that explosions were made to make trenches, just like in Stalingrad, at least up to the chest. Beside that, we used all the caves. 10,000 tons of weapons were concentrated and sheltered in these caves. Four hospitals were set up there. But all of this was for a very sad business. You want some numbers from me. For example there was...Robert said that about 80 million would have been killed if a nuclear war had been unleashed. I can't say exactly how much. If we had allowed this nuclear stupidity, maybe even this much would have been killed. But if it had been a war with conventional weapons, hundreds of thousands of people would have been killed. I thought so. By the way, we thought it would be a conventional war. For instance, General Pliev would say, even during the most tense moments, that we will fight to the end, that he will lead all the remaining people into the last attack. And then we will go to the mountains- Scambrai or Sierra Maestro- and we'll fight together with Fidel. He said these words. Maybe naive words, but I want to say something in Pliev's defense. Someone said, I don't remember who or when, I think maybe at the last conference. ...it sounded like a sensation...that supposedly General Pliev was given the right by someone to use nuclear weapons if the Americans attacked Cuba and we are not able to stop them quickly, if communications were bad.

Pliev, supposedly, had the authority to make such a decision. Who would have given a new Herostrat this right? The head of the government that has an army of 260,000 or 300,000, and almost 1000 tanks. And received an order from Khrushchev to fight to the end. Why would he unleash nuclear war on a small island? I don't think it's logical. This question should be studied, I am thinking about this. Let the historian study it. I have facts. The fact is I fulfilled this mission. I don't have the documents now, but I declare that there was an order from Khrushchev not to use nuclear weapons if there were to be an attack. This was a sign of courage in itself, you understand. Of course, there is little consolation if someone is killed by a tank and not by radiation. But still. It's like a terrible nightmare. What shall we do next? Where should mankind go? For how long shall we return to the Caribbean crisis? It's time for the world to find common language...