

Interview with Marshal Titov

TAPE 2, SIDE 2

Your film will be 1 hour 10 minutes, is that right?

[You said that the crisis was not just a crisis of the Caribbean basin. Would you explain this?]

OK, sure. What I meant was that we can't consider the Caribbean crisis as an isolated phenomenon characteristic for some region that suddenly emerged. It does not work this way. It was connected with the post-war politics conducted by two blocs -NATO headed by the United States on one side and by the Warsaw Pact countries headed by the Soviet Union. Such a crisis was possible, because of the tense political situation at that time -you know that the Cold War was going on -not only in the Caribbean basin, it could be, say, Turkish. It could be connected with the deployment of American missiles on Turkish land. I worked at the General Headquarters, and when we considered what could happen if these missiles were used against the Soviet Union, then we saw that the whole territory of the south of our country could be covered by the missiles, and the damage would be enormous. But at that time, the Soviet government didn't go for such a confrontation, although we could have, we had enough forces to concentrate troops, say, on the border with Turkey, lay down certain terms to Turkey and its allies, and tell them -either you remove the missiles -or we will begin military actions. But I think that it didn't happen then because the Soviet Government demonstrated a certain restraint. Well, this crisis could have been a Mediterranean one, because there were missiles set against the Soviet Union in Italy and so on. But it happened that it became the Caribbean crisis, because when the Soviet Union brought its missiles to Cuba, the situation was intensified to the extreme because the American leaders thought that could not be permitted. That's why I am saying...that the development of the international situation in those years, finally lead to a confrontation in the Caribbean region, on Cuba. Because at that time, the Soviet government, the Soviet Union faced basically two problems: the first one was how to defend Cuba, which had just had a revolution, and the Cuban people needed help in defending their right to independent existence, and on the other hand, we thought then before the crisis that on the other hand, we had to show the American leadership and the West, that they should stop interfering everywhere, and that you are not so strong, and we could resist you. There were two tasks -one was to defend Cuba, and the other was to show that they should stop interfering , you know, that's enough. Because every action of such sort would prompt a counteraction from the Soviet leadership. These were two tasks that were being solved by the Soviet government at that period, the period of the Caribbean crisis.

[And Khrushchev felt both of those tasks personally as well as the leader of the country?]

I didn't understand the question.

[clarification of question]

He himself talked about it during his speech in the Supreme Soviet after the Caribbean crisis. It wasn't my policy, you understand, this was the policy of the country's leadership, the Soviet leaders. That's why

I mean those two tasks that were set during the defense of Cuba and the resolving of the global problems at that time, otherwise there was no sense in sending troops there, and even more so the missiles that were capable of covering the whole territory of the United States of America. I mean the R-12 and R-14 missiles, which by today's standards are medium-range missiles. But back then they were strategic weapons, because they were supposed to solve strategic tasks. Although missiles like the Jupiter that were in Turkey, they also were meant to solve strategic tasks, although they had a smaller range. When we were solving the problem of what kind of forces should be sent to Cuba to solve both of these problems... We could just set one task -to defend Cuba. We could send infantry, provide it with anti-aircraft weapons, and we could say, yes, the task is fulfilled, but there was no guarantee that the United States would not all the same attack Cuba, like it was in 1961 at the Bay of Pigs, this infamous attempt to crush the revolutionary government on Cuba...So we were faced with the question of how ultimately to resolve this problem, and a decision was made to send missiles to Cuba, you understand. And finally, after the crisis...was winding down, and the situation was analyzed, there were different opinions. "We should not have removed the missiles...We should not have brought the missiles" and so on. But we thought at that time that we fulfilled both tasks although... the removal of the missiles, and maybe even not the removal itself, no one argued with that and no one condemned that, the missiles were removed because we needed to ease the tension that was a threat to even maybe peace in the world. But the removal under the control of observers influenced in a certain way the psychology of the Soviet people who were on Cuba at that time, I mean the generals, the officers and the soldiers. So, I must say that we didn't feel very good about that. But, on the whole, there was an understanding of the fact that we fulfilled the task. And aside from that, after the missiles had been removed, there was the problem of what to do with everything else? We left practically all our ammunition on Cuba, we retrained the revolutionary armed forces of Cuba so they could operate the new Soviet equipment that had been brought there. And, basically, the second task was also fulfilled, or I would even say still another task -because we gave them the equipment and ammunition and a very strong Cuban army was created that became, I would say, maybe the second strongest army after the American army. So, Cuba itself was very well protected at that time. Even after the withdrawal of the Soviet troops from Cuba. Although we left a certain number of specialists who helped explain the equipment and repaired and maintained it.

[Before the crisis, did you think that the United States might launch a first strike against the soviet union?]

Against Cuba?

[clarification]

Against the Soviet Union? Well, you know..I would say that there wasn't any such a feeling...that someone could start it first, say, the Americans against us... But the general atmosphere of mistrust in that period could...by itself have led to some unpredictable consequences. Because sometimes people just make mistakes, you understand, in evaluating the situation... I will tell you this -for a long time NATO conducted training exercises that was called Autumn Forge... These exercises were usually conducted in the fall for a long time, every fall, every year... And we considered it not just exercise but a

rehearsal for war... You understand, because a tremendous number of forces were engaged in the training: infantry, marine, air forces... And when such exercise began, we always thought, so what if it grow into something bigger... You understand, maybe... somewhere, as a result of some mistake, or as a result of some incorrect actions, evaluation, even during exercises... You understand.... And we were always alarmed Well, I don't want to say that it didn't alarm the American leaders and the American commanders when we conducted our exercises. But I have to say that we never conducted exercises within the Warsaw Pact on the same scale as NATO did. So, I wouldn't say that we were sure that the Americans would make a first strike, although there was a danger of starting a war by accident... And besides, when there is no trust in each other, there is always some danger, you understand... Always. That's why there should be more trust among people, to diminish the danger, you understand.. There should be trust that no one will start first. This process of armament and developing armed forces that began after the World War II was to a great extent because of the mistrust between different countries at that time... Although in the following years there were attempts to remove these problems... As a result of negotiations, before 1985, there was about 30 different agreements on issues of disarmament, the nuclear test ban, cuts in the nuclear weapons and conventional weapons, on establishing some norms of trust... All of this, of course, helped in solving these problems... But, alas, people make mistakes, the leaders make mistakes and all people make mistakes... But during the Caribbean crisis common sense won, but it could have been different...I'll tell you this: on October 25, 26 and 27, we were waiting for an attack on Cuba. We were all ready, the troops had taken up positions, command centers were up and ready, the radio system had already been set up, because we didn't exclude the possibility of an attack on Cuba...J And as later Mr. MacNamara said in Havana this year, that indeed, a large group of air forces was prepared... If I remember correctly, around 1200 air strikes were to have been made, and, of course, a landing of infantry and the marines would follow, and so on... So, how it would have ended, it's hard to say... But it's good that common sense won and it never happened... Because we, after all, understood that even a small conflict could grow into the World War III... Because I don't think that Europe could stay out of it, there were some problems there... And I know that both NATO and Warsaw Pact troops were put on a high alert status... And it could have resulted in a world-wide conflagration, which, of course, would have been a catastrophe for mankind... But thank God it happened the way it did ... And both President Kennedy and Khrushchev had enough courage to forget their ambitions and ...to agree that a war could not be permitted. Although, I must say that Khrushchev, when he set the tasks for Soviet troops on Cuba, he even then said that war could not be permitted. That is, initially it was understood that a war could not be permitted. But we had to help Cuba. And we had to show the Americans that they should stop interfering everywhere.. We had to do that... And we did it...You understand... But I have to excuse myself, by Americans I of course mean the American leadership, and not the people. No one wants a war, no one. It's always works like that the leaders send people to war, but they themselves sit somewhere in the background... It's always been like this, and even now, unfortunately, the events that are taking place on the territory of the former, as they say now, Soviet Union, prove it...

[And that is the way it way on Cuba, yes?]

And on Cuba, too. Well, in what sense? In the sense that there were a lot of troops concentrated there. Or what? I didn't quite understand.

[clarifies question]

Well, you know, many years have passed since that time, 30 years... And mankind has gotten a little smarter, I think, although they are continuing to do stupid things, you understand. But still, such problems as nuclear weapons are being approached with more responsibility than it was then... Because the events that took place after that... And even these numerous experiments with nuclear power... And Chernobyl accident... They showed that it's a very dangerous power... If, God forbid, dozens or even hundreds nuclear strikes were to be made on the territory of this or that country, this would be a catastrophe for all mankind. No one would be able to protect himself from this... Because nuclear power is a terrible power... And God forbid that it should be used some day ... Well, you know, two bombs were used in Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and you know how it ended. But those were air explosions, but if, God forbid, they had been surface explosions? I don't know, what would have been there even now. And the Chernobyl disaster -you can see what happened We have so much contaminated land, and people can't live there We have to decide what to do with these people, and so on... And God forbid, if huge territories were to be covered by nuclear contamination? It's difficult to imagine, you understand... It would be the end of civilization, a catastrophe, you understand.

[some discussion among the recording crew]

Yes, yes, I'm always ready.

[What the situation was on October 25 from the military perspective.]

Well, you know, the tension of the situation was reflected in the following: President Kennedy made his famous declaration...there was a higher intensity of American aircraft flying over Cuba, I mean fighter-bombers... Then, spy-planes appeared, the U-2, that started reconnaissance photography... And we thought, judging by the intelligence .data that we were receiving, that the concentration of the forces in American ports: at airports... Everything suggested that any minute now there should be an attack on Cuba. In spite of the fact, that negotiations were taking place at that time, on the level of governments, between President Kennedy and Khrushchev... But we didn't exclude the possibility.... And besides, we didn't have information on the negotiations that would give us a clear picture of them, you understand, their status on a certain date;' and -then everything was changing by the hour. So, as military people, we had to take necessary measures in order to defend...Cuba. And all of this, growing tension, not knowing the results of the negotiations, and they didn't bother to inform us about them, all of this made us take military measures: the troops were put on a higher state of alert, the command staff were in the command centers on the outskirts... And we were ready to fight back an attack on Cuba by the American Armed Forces. And besides, you know, there was a kind of a ominous tension at that, time... We felt that lightning could strike at any moment...And when the American U-2 aircraft was shot down, that was already, shall we say, the limit of our patience, because, not receiving clear information from Moscow, we didn't know what was going on there, what compromises they were reaching... And meanwhile, intensive reconnaissance was going on, all our deployments were becoming known to the American

commanders... And it was then that the commander of the forces, General Pliev made the decision to shoot down this U-2 airplane that was conducting high-altitude photography over the Cuban territory. And we were immediately reprimanded by Moscow: they told us we acted too quickly... Well, from the political point of view, maybe they were right, but from the military point of view, we were thinking that we were too late with this airplane... Because reconnaissance had already been conducted by the Americans and we should have taken some military measures earlier... Because, by that time, the Cubans had already made a decision to act, but they didn't have the means to shoot down airplanes like the U-2, they just had artillery, but such an aircraft could only be shot down by a missile. And we did just that.

[Did Fidel urge you to start firing?]

I insisted? I didn't understand.

[clarification]

Well, Fidel had already made a decision...as the commander-in-chief of the Cuban forces, he had decided to shoot down the American airplanes. And the artillery, the anti-aircraft troops were already shooting at the American air planes... He also thought that such a free reconnaissance of the territory should not be permitted, you understand.. But Fidel did not decide to shoot or not to shoot, this could only be decided by the commander, or by an order from Moscow, or in case when there was such a situation that he himself had to decide what to do. To shoot or not to shoot. And such a decision was made... Well, I don't know, there were different rumors, like Fidel took responsibility for this. But the airplane was shot down, everyone knows it now, by the Soviet troops with a Soviet missile, this decision was made by the Soviet commanders. So this question is perfectly clear now...

[General Gribkov wrote that Castro took it on as his responsibility to go along with the story that the Cubans had shot the plane at first?]

General Gribkov said it? Where?

[Der Spiegel]

No, he could not write so because he knew very well...

[clarification]

The Cubans were not In charge of our troops, that's why they could not have...

[Castro agreed with the rumor that the Cubans had shot it down. And my question is why?]

Well, you know, I think that maybe he decided to take responsibility for it so as not to jeopardize the negotiations that were going on at that time between the Soviets and the Americans, you understand. Maybe, it's quite possible... Back then, there were different theories on this ... But...since they did not have the means to reach an airplane like U-2 at such high altitude, this airplane could fly at an altitude of

20 km and higher, of course, such an airplane could only be shot down by a missile, and the Soviet commanders were in charge of all the missiles. No one argued with that then.

Well, at that period, when the situation was very tense, there were all kinds of fantasies, rumors, but today, when all this is in the past, and everything is clear -who did the shooting and how, we know...everything, exactly how it was. So, there is no sense in fantasies now... And besides, both Americans and we, we agreed to tell the truth about everything, now that we are approaching the 30th anniversary of the event.

[Were you asking for permission to begin the fire?]

What kind of retaliation? I didn't understand.

[clarification]

Well, we had such an order: if there were to be an attack on Cuba, we were to take all measures necessary to resist... So, we didn't even need any additional orders... If the Americans had begun an attack, even an air attack, we would have started to act, that is, we would have shot down American airplanes, and we had enough anti-aircraft artillery, anti-aircraft missiles, if I remember correctly, there were 144 installations on Cuba at that time... And the very first air attacks would have unleashed a war, you understand... around Cuba... Because we would have retaliated... If an airborne or marine landing had occurred, or course, we would have had to fight them, in other words, we would have retaliated in response to an American attack...By the way, this year, when there was a conference in January in Havana, and Mr. MacNamara asked us whether we would have used the nuclear weapons, General Gribkov said, yes, we would have used them against those forces that would have invaded Cuba. He meant Luna missiles, of course. And everybody was stunned: how could it have ended? Well, with a catastrophe for the group that would have been used against Cuba. But what would have happened next, it's hard to say, that's why we are saying that thank God the leaders of both countries had enough courage and intelligence not to allow this to happen. That is, intervention against Cuba was called off, let's say, the attack on Cuba, by the American leadership, President Kennedy declared that Cuba would not be attacked, and the Soviet leadership reacted accordingly. They promised to withdraw the missiles from Cuba, and to take adequate measures, that is to remove the danger from Cuba and from the United States of America. That's how it was resolved.. But if there had been an attack, of course, it could have ended very badly in this region, in the Caribbean basin.

[How did you make the decision to turn the radar on?]

Well, the radar was turned on when it became clear that any minute now there could be an attack, I would say, an air attack on Cuba. And they had been very active even before that. I must tell you that I myself, when I was in Havana, saw that the American pilots in their fighter-bombers were literally crawling all over the territory of Cuba. We could even see their faces... When they flew over Havana, we made certain gestures to them, and they to us. So, their level of activity was increasing and increasing,

and of course, it's not that simple, you can't just fly in; wave your hands and fly off again. No! Of course, we thought that it was the beginning of active action by the American forces and their air forces... This was the beginning of reconnaissance, they were spotting their targets, so everything was like in war. As they say, war is war, you understand, and that time it was like this ... So, this growing activity by both the air forces and the naval forces indicated that, aggression against Cuba might be unleashed at any moment.

[What were you hearing from Moscow during that time?]

Not very much. Information was very scarce. We knew that negotiations were taking place, this we knew... That very difficult negotiations were taking place between the American and the Soviet leaders to somehow avert this crisis, we knew that, yes... But we didn't have constant information about what was going on in the negotiations, what steps were being taken. Unfortunately, we didn't know that. Only later, when Mikoyan came to Cuba-he was first in Washington for the negotiations, and then he came to Cuba. At that point, he told us everything, how the negotiations were developing, how the questions were resolved and so on. But unfortunately it was only later. But when the military preparations were intensifying, and diplomatic negotiations were taking place at that time, we, unfortunately knew very little about them. That's why, as military people, we were forced to take necessary measures to not permit surprise attack, so that they would not take us by surprise. That's why we had turned on the radars, and we were ready to fight back air attacks of the American air forces.

[Did you think Moscow understood what was going on in Cuba?]

Well, I think that they understood, of course, what was going on, but maybe they... although we reported to them about every step that we were taking. But the thing is that.... we had constant communication, we reported to Moscow what we were doing and how. But you know, I think that there was a great deal of tension in Moscow because not only the Caribbean basin was at play, it had become a global problem, you understand... For example, I thought then that the whole business would not be limited to Cuba, you understand, and that this could go too far, and that military operations in Europe were possible, and everywhere where there were Soviet troops, NATO troops and Warsaw Pact troops. So it had become a global danger... And in order to localize intensive negotiations were taking place at that time... And I think that at some point during these negotiations they didn't have time for us. We were somehow solving our problems on Cuba and that was fine. ! But the main problem was being solved there, the problem of averting war, this was the main problem that was being resolved..

That is why we were kept on a starvation diet, as they say, as far as information was concerned.

TAPE 2, SIDE 1

[question: how many weapons were in Cuba by the time the, Americans discovered the missiles]

By that time... I would say that... by that time we had a group of about 40 thousand people. Infantry troops had been fully deployed there-we had our regiments there-then anti-aircraft forces were also fully deployed there, two divisions; then the aircraft was almost fully deployed, excluding the IL-28

aircraft. Well, the naval forces... of the naval forces that were supposed to have been there, practically nothing had arrived, I mean surface ships and submarines... There was a small group of our naval forces. Well, .and the most important thing that was there were the missiles... The missiles, I must tell you, that the regiments of R-12s had been fully deployed there, and as far as R-14s are concerned, which had more range-they had a range up to four and a half thousand kilometers-these missiles had not been deployed on Cuba, they were still on , their way, and later they were returned. So, a rather substantial group had been deployed on Cuba by that time. But of course it's another matter that not everything was fully in position, because the situation and the events that were taking place did not allow us to do everything the way we would have wanted. And besides that, there were some problems accommodating the troops because Cuba is a tropical country, which was unusual for us. Let say, we had to put our troops where there was water, where we could feed our people, and camouflage them, and it wasn't very easy to do. Although, on the whole, I think that we fulfilled our mission fairly well from a military point of view. And by the way, even the American military people acknowledge this-those who were there then, today acknowledge this fact. Because they underestimated this group. They thought...as Mr. MacNamara said, they thought this group was ... well, we estimated about 10 thousand strong that is, American intelligence were off by a factor of four. So...the group that was there was capable of beating back the attack, if it was necessary, especially the anti-aircraft forces and the infantry.

[question: and during the crisis, Kennedy was told that there were no nuclear warheads present on Cuba...]

That's what they were told?

[yes]

Well, this was wrong information, because nuclear warheads were already there. For example, missiles for the Lunas were already there, so the information that the president was receiving, if this' really true, this information was not entirely reliable, though I doubt it. I think that the president did know, because when he gave that speech, and we found out the text of his speech, when he gave his speech on the 22nd, we understood that they knew that there were nuclear warheads on Cuba. Because he showed on television the range of the Soviet missiles, and he said that this threat is very real, so, naturally, he had this information.

[How many warheads were present?]

Well, you know, as far as...the R-12 is concerned, then it depends on how you look at it-where they were. It's one thing to talk about...say...when the warhead was attached to the missile and IS already on the position, this is one thing, say. And it's completely different to talk about when they are somewhere at some distance, this is a different thing, and another thing when they are, say, on a ship. Understand? For example, the warheads, well some of them were already on the territory of Cuba. I don't remember now exactly how many. But some of them were still in port, still on the ships. And we did not even unload them, they were all sent back. But they were already in port on Cuba, and some of them were in position, for example, warheads for Luna missiles, for R-12 missiles...well, the R-14 were not yet there of

course. So, that's why ... Well, I don't remember the exact numbers now, we'll have to look at some documents, but all that was already there.

[question: How long would it take to get the rockets ready?]

You know, this is, well...There are different degrees of readiness with missiles. The missiles had different degrees of readiness. Let's say, let's say, if it's already on the launching pad, is already fueled or at the highest degree of readiness, as we say, then at this highest degree of readiness, with the missiles that were there then, we needed between three-and-a-half and four hours in order to launch after that. If they were not yet on the launching pads, and we had to transport them, to assemble them and so on, it would take a lot more time. Because you should keep in mind that they were liquid-fuel missiles, so we had to charge them, refuel them. So, accordingly, the operations that we had to carry out, they took some time. But if the missile was at the highest degree of readiness, when it is already on the launching pad, then for the control and checks, for refueling, some time was needed, you understand. Some three-and-a-half to four hours. But for missiles like Luna, we didn't need that kind of time, because it could be launched immediately if it was already assembled because it was a solid-fuel missile, that is it was fueled in advance, you just have to attach the missile itself to the warhead.

[And the Soviet commanders had the authority to launch those Lunas?]

The Soviet commanders did not have such authority, without Moscow, without permission from Moscow, nobody had the right to launch. The commander had the following authority as far as the Lunas are concerned, and even then, only in case of an attack or a landing by the Americans, you understand, that is the real threat of an attack of Cuba, then the commander, if he couldn't communicate with Moscow, and he didn't have the opportunity, he could make decisions for himself. But only with the Lunas, everything else -no. Only on orders from Moscow. But I don't think that such an order from Moscow would actually have arrived. So, in this respect, it was very strict. No one on Cuba had the right to make such a decision. You understand... I mean regarding the R-12s and R-14.

[but with the Lunas, if the commander couldn't communicate with Moscow, he had the authority to launch them...]

Yes, of course, the commander would himself make decisions... But what can you do? War is a war. You understand. And Moscow was far away, communications were not very... good, you understand, that is why he had such a right.

[Did you know that at that time?]

What? What?

[translator clarifies question]

Well, I have to say that I knew, but not everybody knew. The commander knew, yes. A small circle of people knew about it. So...this was a very serious business, and not everyone was let in on it, all the more so since it involved nuclear weapons. It's just like in the American Army, and in our army, it is

under a strict control, and a very restricted circle of people. As far as I know, in the United States, the president has the right to it, and in our country, also just the leadership of the country. It is controlled accordingly in order to prevent non-sanctioned actions. God forbid, if this system had not been created, maybe mankind already would be suffered through some tragedy. That is why when nuclear weapons were created, such a system of control over non-sanctioned and random actions was also created. You understand... That is why people are paying so much attention now to the fact that the Soviet Union got itself into such a situation where the missiles are located on the territory of Ukraine, Belarus, Kazakhstan and Russia. Once all of them were under unified control, and now these questions need to be solved in such a manner so as not to permit an accident. This is a source of worry for the whole world.

[Did you fear that the Lunas might be launched on the 24, 25 of September?]

It would have been impossible to use the Luna against America. Its range is only 65 kilometers...

[translator clarifies question]

But the Luna could only be use up to a distance of 65 kilometers, that's all.

[translator clarifies question]

No, well, I already said that...that yes, it was to be used in case of an attack, yes, against the attacking troops. But...its range was only 65 kilometers, so it could not even reach Florida, to say nothing of any other American territory.

[But they would have killed many American soldiers?]

I think that before that, many Soviet soldiers would have been killed, because before that would have been an air attack of tremendous strength by the American Air Force. And besides that, I don't know what would have been left on Cuba after an air attack. Maybe, all of the Luna missiles would have been destroyed then, because the Americans had conducted intensive air reconnaissance, they had noted all the deployments, and it couldn't be excluded that everything would have been destroyed by the very first air attack, since the attack would have been on all positions that would have been discovered at that time. You understand...So, it's hard to say what would have happened if the attack had been made. But, of course, the forces that would have survived the attack would have done something, but what would have been left, it's hard to say. Instead of six launching systems, just one or two might have survived, or maybe none, you understand. We can only guess now what would have happened if the military operations had begun. You understand.

[But it was very dangerous.]

But you know, I will tell you that war is always dangerous. I took part in the Great Patriotic War; I know what war is like. When people are killed in great numbers, when a big war is going on, it's really terrible. And the scary thing is that not only soldiers are killed, although they are people who also have the right to live, but I was always shocked most when children were killed who hadn't even begun to live. They were just beginning to live, understand. Just like not, in Bendery, during the air attack on Bendery, 600

innocent people were killed, including children, you understand. When someone kills someone, say, some bandit, he is brought to trial. But when one leader of a government makes a decision and kills hundreds of people, for some reason he can get away with it. It's an absurdity that still exists in society. That is why sometimes such wars are unleashed -local wars, because everybody thinks that he has the right to play with the fates of thousands and thousands of people, although no one gave him this right. And the laws made up by these very people often work against these very same people. It's an absurdity that still exists in the human society. I would bring to trial, for instance, the Moldovan president, and you can record this if you like, for sanctioning the attack on Bendery, and many women, children and old people -innocent people -were killed. And then he comes to Moscow and they meet with him, and they even smile to him.

[If there had been an attack and thousands of Soviet soldiers had died, what do you think would have been the response of the Soviet Union?]

You know, I don't like to make guesses, I am a military person, I am used to working with real facts, you understand. Well, it's hard to say what would have happened, you know. I can only say one thing -I think that someone probably would have stopped it. I don't think that in the situation that was then, someone would have dared to take actions that could have led to a catastrophe. Because, I think so, I don't know, but I think, that President Kennedy thought that the situation on Cuba could lead to military actions in Europe and there was no sense in exchanging Cuba for Europe, and Khrushchev thought the same way. It was not by chance that he, at the very beginning, said that we cannot permit a war. This was the underlying policy. We should help Cuba, we should show the Americans...the American leadership that they are not as strong as they think and they can't dictate their terms all over the world, but the most important thing was to not permit war. So, I don't think that this would have happened. I don't think so. You know, the situation was very difficult, very grim at that time, and we all suffered psychologically. You know, somewhere is your home, your children, it was very difficult. But still we believed that common sense would win. How it would end, maybe with some kind of trouble, maybe damage to our prestige even, but we didn't want to believe that this might lead to a catastrophe.

[Were you afraid at the time when you thought about your home and your children?]

Well, what do you mean, common sense disappeared? Common sense should never disappear, you understand. Otherwise it is difficult to work, to make decisions. But a soldier has a duty, he has a duty. He can think about his family...about his children, his parents, but he has a duty which he has to carry out, you understand. Because otherwise no mission could be completed, you understand. That's why, how can you say, that if a person thinks... For instance, they sometimes say, he has this religion and it forbids him to be in the military. By the way, it has become fashionable to talk about this now. So, in this case, he must fulfill some other kind of duty, that is he must...work at a construction site, and so on. But if everyone will do so, that we'll have to dissolve the army, maybe this would even be a good thing to do, and ...there will be no military actions.

[People were saying to Kennedy, "If we launch our missiles, Khrushchev will not respond. "]

You know, it's hard to say. It's easy to give advice, but it's difficult to make decisions. I hear a lot of advice, but it's not difficult to advise when you are not responsible for anything. But when you are responsible for a country, and maybe not only for a country, but for the whole world, to be or not to be, the person who is making decisions should listen not to one person but to a lot of advice. I don't know what Khrushchev would have done, it's hard to say. But I can say that if I were in Khrushchev's place, if it had happened that way, I would have responded I could respond how? ..well, say, with actions in Europe. What kind of actions? Well, it's hard to say. Well, Berlin, for example, or some other kind of actions, it's hard to say, you understand. And then both Kennedy and Khrushchev had advisors, but what kind of advice they might have given Khrushchev, I don't know. In any case, I must tell you I knew the leadership of the Ministry of Defense at that time. They were rather decisive people, they were people who went through World War II, they knew how to fight, they were leaders of the old school, they had a lot of combat experience. It could not even be compared to the experience that...NATO troops had at that time, although they also had experience from World War II, but, you know, it's hard to say... I am just saying thank God it did not happen, you understand. Because the most dangerous thing is when advisors advise you and they are not responsible, they only advise, and then somebody else has to get out of the mess as they say. And it's always the simple people, they're the ones who have to pay for all this. Soldiers, officers, workers and so on.

[Where was the command center once the crisis had begun, where were you getting your information from, where was the Cuban command center?]

Well...when the troops were brought to Cuba, they were deployed in certain regions, they got settled, because we brought not only troops but also these little houses, barracks...they built them in places where our troops were. As for the command centers... Well, the group command center for the Soviet troops on Cuba was in Havana, on the outskirts...there is a town there called El Chico. On the outskirts of Havana. Well, command centers were located where the troops were, not far away. Communication lines were established. Well, we used Cuban telephone communications, we also used our own communications -radio-relay stations were established to provide communications. Radio communications... Well, if military operations had begun, we would have fully set up radio communications and used them, but at the time we were using the communications equipment that was already there, in order not to give away the entire system of communications, because it was very important. So, that's how it was... And aside from that, Cuba is not a large country, so we had ways of getting around like, say automobiles, airplanes. We used them for communications, too. For example, I very often traveled around Cuba, visited military units, covering almost the whole country. Sometimes I traveled by airplane. And when you're on a plane... When you take off... When you're on the ground, it seems like everything is normal - land here, land there, but when you take off, you look around and everywhere you look, you can see only water... Yes.. And sometimes you think: if the war begins, where would we retreat, in what direction? To the left or the right? Yes... So, it was a very interesting situation.

[Did you see and talk to Fidel?]

You know, each of us had his own business to attend to. Missile personnel were engaged in the business with the missiles. So...that's, why I can't say that Fidel traveled all around, I don't think he went

everywhere, but he visited some places. I have to say that the whole deployment of Soviet troops was coordinated with the General Headquarters and the leadership of Cuba. We cooperated very closely. For example, I was in the General Headquarters almost every day, I mean the General Headquarters of the Cuban Armed Forces. And all these questions that were connected with deploying and using the troops, they were coordinated. And by the way, I was in charge of coordinating our actions in case of war. It was one of my main assignments. And we traveled with the commander of the troops, Raul and Fidel also traveled. But to say that he visited everywhere... I don't think so, because... Well, they were deploying their own troops, too. And if I remember correctly, they mobilized about 250,000 people from reserves, they deployed their coast guard troops, and troops that they had for protecting the main political and economic centers. So, of course, he traveled a lot at that time, but he also had his own business, his own armed forces. He was the Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces of Cuba.

[Did you and the Cubans coordinate the decision to go on alert?]

Of course, our command centers communicated with each other all the time. The commanders met with each other and discussed the problems involved in coordinating our actions...that was natural, yes. But each commander gave orders to his own troops, you understand. The commanders of the Soviet troops gave orders to their troops, and the Cubans -to their own troops. But, of course, we had a very close cooperation. That's natural.

[The Cubans told me how close they became to many of the Soviet troops and the Cubans felt the Soviets there were ready to fight to the last man in there had been an invasion...]

I would say that yes, the friendship was very strong, and I must tell you that our soldiers behaved very well, with dignity. And the more complex the situation became, the better they behaved, that is they were very reliable people, you understand. And besides, it was in traditions of our army -we have always helped others, we helped them to harvest the sugar-cane, our soldiers also worked there, we helped in training them. Well, where we could and with what we could, we helped them. And I would say that at that time there was no differentiation between the Soviets and the Cubans. So, indeed, we were like one family, you understand. And that's how it's supposed to be. And I think, that at that time it encouraged people, and helped them to be truly prepared, to be morally and psychologically prepared for a possible attack on Cuba, you understand.

[Do you remember a moment when you yourself feared that an attack could be coming at any time?]

{You know, I would say, that I had that kind of feeling from October 26 to October 27, when a very...grim and tense situation set in. And then this airplane was shot down, the tension was growing, it seemed that any moment now... Although we didn't want to believe, but morally people were ready for it, you understand. That anything could happen. And the fact that we didn't know anything about the negotiations, whether they had ended or were continuing or what was happening there, and this influenced this very tense situation and our feelings even more. We didn't know anything about the negotiations, and this...degree of certainty or uncertainty...influenced accordingly the psychological condition of the people.

[For example?]

What kind of example?

[translator clarifies question]

Well, I didn't quite...understand...What kind of example? Well, we were all human beings, we talked about our feelings about the situation among ourselves all the time. We guessed what could happen, what to expect and what not to expect, you understand. It was natural, because....well...there was a concern for everything, not only for yourself, say, for the country, for the duty that we had to carry out...but also for our family and so on. We thought like this: we're here in this position, but what is it like at home, in Europe, what is happening there, we didn't know about that either, you understand. That is, I would say, there were...moments when there was a kind of uncertainty of the situation, you understand. And that's the most terrible thing, and it influences people's mind. During the War, the Great Patriotic War, you knew for sure: '-there is the enemy, there is a war already going on, people are shooting, so everything is clear, what you have to do. But when there is uncertainty, when you are ready to fulfill your duty, you are ready to do what you are asked to do, but you don't know whether you'll have to do it today or tomorrow, or maybe you won't have to do it at all... You understand. So, this is the ...most unpleasant thing about being in such a situation. Especially for a military person. A military person should always know for sure that he should do this and that, but if he is kept in the dark, this is the worst thing for him. Maybe they'll tell you tomorrow to shoot, or not to shoot, to fight or not to fight. Although no one wants to fight, and especially military people, say, and especially those who had fought already, who know what war is like, you understand.. Those, who are young and inexperienced... or have some feelings that are sometimes strange.... But those who had been in a war and fought for a long time, they understand...And when they have lost so many people, their comrades in arms, their friends...it's very difficult. So we always say, "God forbid... We don't need any war." As they say, a bad peace is better than a good fight, or how do they say it... there is such a proverb.

END OF TAPE 2, SIDE 1

TAPE 2, SIDE 2

[what was your reaction to the eventual resolution of the crisis and the missiles were removed?]

You know, the fact the missiles were removed... We reacted normally to it. But how they were removed is a different thing. It was very unpleasant. Because we thought that the continuing pressure that was taking place, it had an effect on our prestige, whether you want it or not, on the prestige of the country and of the leadership and the army. So that was rather painful for us there. We said that if such an order has been given, an order is an order and we should obey it, but it should have been done differently, you understand. We should have come to a gentlemen's agreement that we would remove the missiles, as it should be, without any kind of observers... But the way it happened was that we were removing the missiles and they were checking everything. This has a bad effect on our morale. It wasn't just me who felt that way-all of us felt that way then on Cuba. To say nothing of the Cubans who were very nervous about it all. And of course I think they were right in their feelings, because no one even... asked them.

When the missiles were brought, they talked with them, but when the missiles were removed, no one talked with them. So, it happened that everything was being done without them. It wasn't a good thing to do, because.... We ourselves understood this, and we felt a little uncomfortable around our Cuban comrades. Whether you like it or not, we were friends at that time. And to put allies in such a situation was not very nice. All of us...I'd say, definitely condemned this at that time. In that period.

[What was the reaction of the Cubans when they heard about the withdrawal?]

Well, how did they react? They reacted not so much to the fact that the missiles were being withdrawn, but to the fact that no one had talked to them beforehand. And then, Khrushchev declared that if the missiles are removed from Turkey... Well, I can understand the Cubans. Fidel declared, and we agreed with him on this, that "Cuba is not small change." We did everything we could to solve this second problem, as we understood it, because Fidel understood that Cuba's prestige in Latin America would be lowered by deploying the missiles. But he still agreed to it, you understand. He was willing to help the Soviet leadership then, even understanding everything. But since this was done by mutual agreement, the question of withdrawal of the troops...the observers...I mean those who observed the withdrawal...should have been coordinated with the Cubans, that was natural. But because it was never done, there was such a reaction, I'd even say a stormy reaction, on the part of the Cubans. Of course, I personally understood them, I would have done exactly the same thing if I were them. How could it be different? When you are needed, they of course... but when you've been used, when no one even talked to you, ignored you. This wasn't done in a proper way, not properly. Then we all, all the soldiers, or at least all the commanders of the Soviet troops on Cuba, we understood the reactions of the Cuban leadership to these unilateral actions on the part of the Soviet government.

[There were even some Soviet troops who said they would volunteer to fight...]

Yes, there were such feelings, that's true. Because people, you understand, when people are set on fulfilling some task, and they were morally and physically and in every other way ready for it, and then suddenly there is such a reaction, it's only natural that all of this made some people-I'm not saying everyone-react in the way, that you are talking about. Because you have to understand people who were ready to sacrifice their lives, you understand.