

Interviews with Soviet Veterans on FKR convoy

Telephone interview with **Vitalii Matveevich Roshva**, May 7, 2006

Former sergeant, cruise missile mechanic

Participant FKR cruise missile convoy October 26-27, 1962

Q. So what happened?

A. It happened at night. Our unit was moving from the waiting position into the combat position. The first truck in our convoy was “Uazik” with the commander, Major Denischenko. Next was a “Kraz” with field engineering unit – 17-strong. We were moving up the mountainous road. There was total blackout. Suddenly, the truck toppled over.

Q. So you were right behind the field engineers?

A. Yes, behind the field engineers. Our unit was quartered in the former American military school [at Vilorio] which was in 25-27 kilometers from the Guantanamo base. Our mission was to fire at Guantanamo – to destroy the target in case of war. We had moved into pre-start position two days earlier.

Q. Two days – that was approximately October 25?

R. Yes, our unit had moved into pre-start position in full combat force. That night [October 26], I was head of the guard on duty. We had supper, it was already very dark. In October, the dark came at 6 pm. At 10 p.m., I heard a volley of shots. I roused the commander. The decision was not raise an alarm. The commander sent a messenger to headquarters. When he came back, he brought a packet of orders, to move to the combat position.

The road was mountainous. Oriente is a mountainous [“goristy”] region with many ravines, large ravines. We moved toward the main road, two kilometers away, without any lights in the convoy. The combat position was in about 20 kilometers from the waiting position. Both the combat position and the waiting [pre-start] position were in a radius about 25-27 kilometers from Guantanamo.

By dawn, we arrived at the combat positions. There was confusion there. When we arrived, the Cubans opened fire because of a mixup over passwords. At that time, very few of us could speak Spanish. However, the Major had some spoken Spanish and he managed to clear up the situation with the Cubans.

Then we were ordered: “Deploy!” We put guards around the perimeter. By then, it was already dawn. So we deployed our FKR. I was senior aviation mechanic – that is how it was called - of launching device. We were still standing in that position for another 10 days.

Then we received an order to come back to the camp.

Q. To go back to the accident, what happened when that truck fell into the ravine?

A. We were following field engineers, but we got a little bit behind of their truck. Then we heard a terrible noise ahead of us. Our first reaction was that we had been attacked. We stopped – there was complete darkness. We jumped out of our truck and our gun crew, about six people, took up defense positions. Then we heard human screams and howls coming from the ravine below – and rushed down. It was very far below. The people who were sitting along the right side [of the truck] – they were all smashed.

The truck was left in the ravine. We took our people up and lay them on the road. It was difficult to understand who died and who was alive. Then they were loaded on a truck and taken to the garrison. We radioed for a rescue truck. When the truck came, it took everybody to the garrison, and we continued our march ahead.

Q. So you stayed there for some time. How long was it – about an hour?

R. No, about half an hour. Everything happened rather quickly. That's the story.

Q. Did you have many FKR's?

R. 16 FKR's. There were three squadrons with 5-6 FKR's each with combat charge of 300 kg each – such a pig [“bolvanka”]. An FKR was a copy of MIG-15, with an explosive charge instead of a pilot.

Q. What was your mood when you were targeting Guantanamo on those last days – the 25th, 26th?

R. There were many over-flights – low-level flights. The order was not to open fire. So day and night, we were busy camouflaging. The situation was very tense. You know, there was a feeling I have remembered for the rest of my life. During WWII, we were fighting for our land: it was not bitter to die to defend Moscow, Leningrad, Kiev... However, to die far from your Motherland is very hard.

Q. How did they prepare the start position?

A. It was done by the service that was doing the orientation in the terrain. This was done according to the established procedure. When we arrived, we were given an order “Deploy!” We deployed. Then we were ordered, “Entrench!” There was a clearing there, practically no trees. There was a stream with the trees only round the clearing.

We did not have to prepare the start positions – everything had been prepared beforehand.

Q. How many vehicles were there in the convoy?

A. There was “uazik” with the commander and his deputy for political education. They were followed by engineer combat platoon. They were on “Kraz”. Then came our launcher. There were radio service trucks to guide the missile in the flight. There were also vehicles with service units, including logistic supplies.

All in all, there were about 3 dozen trucks.

Q. How many launchers in the convoy?

A. I think three.

Q. Were your launchers camouflaged on the march?

A. Yes, there were camouflage tents.

Q. How many people per launcher?

A. The crew of each launcher included:
commander,
senior aviation mechanic [interviewee's position]
electrician,
electrical mechanic,
radio operator,
driver.

Q. Which vehicle was carrying the FKR?

A. A "Yaz", from the Yaroslavsky factory. This is a powerful prim mover ["tyagach"]

Q. How was FKR transported?

A. There was a trolley ["telezhka"] with rails. The missile was on the rails. During the launch it would slide on the rails, then there would be a push.

Q. Did you have nuclear warheads with you when you were moving to the start position?

A. Yes.

Q. Where were they?

A. Right in the container, with the missile.

Q. And what about the waiting position?

A. Everything had been prepared back at the garrison, it would take just fixing it. It was done back at the garrison. It was not our job, but of the special services.

Q. These services did not go with you, did they?

A. No, they stayed back at the garrison. We had nothing to do with it – our mission was to ensure the launching.

Q. Provided at the start position you are given the order "Launch!" How long would it take to ensure the missile's launching?

A. Not very long – something about an hour.

We used to make test launchings at Kapustin Yar testing field. It is not a complicated procedure.

Q. What is the range of an FKR?

A. Up to 400 km – those were “frontovye”, that is tactical weapons.

Q. Then why would they place them so close to Guantanamo?

A. That was a strategic issue, that was none of our business. We had nothing to do with it.

Q. Did they [Cubans] begin shooting?

A. Yes, they opened fire – warning fire. There was a confusion – it was an unpleasant situation. However, that did not last long. Our deputy commander for political education spoke Spanish, and he quickly explained the situation. He was also a Major, but I do not remember his name.

Death of Viktor Mikheev

Letter written to the mother of deceased Russian soldier Viktor Mikheev from his former comrades:

“You have written that relatives of Vitya Mikheev visited you. He was my good comrade and friend. We had been serving together at Klimovo, we sailed together on “Nickolai Burdenko” and here we lived in the same barrack.

This happened in the sleepless night from the 26th to 27th of October last year. Our unit stayed at alarm. [“stoyala po trevoge”] At 17, 18, 20 ... o’clock a massive air attack against Cuba was expected, and hence the beginning of the war. At around 23-24 o’clock field-engineering platoon (Vitya Mikheev was among them) went to escort transport to an emplacement [“poekhal soprovozhdat’ transport na tochku”.] In some time, we learned that the KRAZ [type of heavy truck] has overturned. Three people died – one Cuban and two ours [“nashikh”.] This took place approximately in a kilometer from Mayary in the Oriente province (east.) The guys were buried in Santiago at the cemetery under a big arch with a round glass dome. In that place, they bury people who have great revolutionary merits. They were dressed in Cuban military uniform. The bodies were bricked into a wall [“zamurovyvali v stenu.] The place Mikheev body was placed into was covered by a white square [“kvadrat”] under No. 5.

Let know [“Peredaite”] that the grief of Mikheev’s close ones is shared by his comrades.”

2) Ministry of Defense Death Notice

Military Unit
52676
07 February 1963
No. 123/3/203
Moscow, K-160

Entry No. 82-M
To Citizen MIKHEEVA A.N.
Moscow Region,
Ramensky district,
town of Bronnitsy, village Borshevo

Dear Alexandra Nesterovna!

Your letter addressed to the Minister of Defense of the USSR has been considered on assignment. ["po porucheniju rassmotreno"]

I am sorry to inform you, dear Alexandra Nesterovna, that your son died far from our Motherland where he was at field exercise. I understand your feelings and maternal grief which I sincerely share.

Your son Victor was buried with all military honors at the site of dislocation of the unit he was serving with.

Since the place your son is buried is far from our Motherland, there is no possibility of your visiting the burial site, nor of transporting the body to your place of residence.

Lieutenant-General

USHAKOV