

Interview with Grigory Romanovich **Danilevich**, Colonel. Head of the political section of the PVO division.

July 3, 2004

The events in Cuba have stayed vivid in my memory – and will stay until the end of my days.

In that time I was a Colonel, head of political department [politotdel] of PVO [anti-aircraft] division. My exact title was Deputy Division Commander for political part [“po politicheskoi chasti”]

It was our division that shot down U-2 plane.

Q. Tell me the situation on October 27.

A. The assignment [to go to Cuba] given by the country’s top leadership, was unexpected for us. Not to disclose military secret, it should all look like field exercises under the conditions of sea march. ... We did not know where we were going. [As the political officer] my task was to explain everything so well to the officers, to the subordinates that they would feel the high responsibility.

Everything developed in stages. First, we were told the division had to successfully carry out field training – to earn a high grade. This all had to be explained to the officers, communists, Komsomol members.

The division’s HQ was located in Volgograd.

From Volgograd we received marching orders to the sea port of Feodosiya, Eastern Crimea. Everything was done so that to keep [real destination] in secret.

So it went in stages:

Get ready for the march,

Get ready to get aboard the train,

Then the port of Feodosiya with boarding sea ships.

So in Feodosiya the order was to load on board the ships. So all of it was disguised as field exercises including sea voyage.

Our boat had a beautiful name - “Latvia”. The captain’s name was Gogridze. The boat had been registered at Odessa seaport.

Right before sailing, in the captain’s cabin, Voronkov, chief of division’s staff Col. Povid’ko and me – the three of us with the captain being the fourth – were summoned by Marshal Kazakov who set the task for us.

First, under any circumstances not to let any outsiders get on the boat, not to let seize the boat.

Second, it was keeping general order.

The third, to my mind most interesting, was to open an absolutely secret packet upon going past the Gibraltar – and to learn what to do next.

We wore military uniform while en route to Feodosiya. When we came to Feodosiya, there was a collection point, where they changed us into civilian clothes. The officers kept their military uniforms in their suitcases and the sergeants and soldiers – in their backpacks.

They gave us quite enough of civilian clothes. Each got a civilian suit, including soldiers. We were also given no less than two sets of shirts and trousers. Then in Cuba we were supplied with more clothes.

We all wore civilian clothes while boarding the boat. Nobody told us why civilian clothes, but we understood without explanations: it’s just necessary.

Q. Didn't they explained you why?

A. [laughing] But nobody even asked!

Q. Did you know where you where going?

A. Of course we didn't.

Q. And what were you thinking?

A. We did some thinking. We thought we were going to some, as they now say, hot spot, either to Vietnam, or to Indonesia – we knew we'd land somewhere. Perhaps.

It was a civilian boat. Everybody were sailing by civilian boats. "Latvia" was a coast boat – a cabotage boat. It was not big and not for sailing across the ocean.

When you know that nobody will answer, why ask?

After Gibraltar, the captain summoned us to his cabin. We opened the packed and it read: we are going to Cuba.

Q. How many people knew of the packet's content?

A. At that point just three: the division commander, me and the chief of staff – and the captain. However, the captain knew all along, because he had already made one voyage [to Cuba.] But he didn't say a word about it. There was an instruction to carry out in-depth explanation work with all kinds of personnel. There was also a brief historical reference on Cuba. Very brief, but in-depth. It was very cleverly written.

I remembered [from that reference] that the Cuban people were worth fighting for. There was a brief history of Cuban people, Cuban state, in brief. Especially names of such revolutionaries as Jose Marty and others.

I must say that for all of us it was not easy to stand to this task. It took deep psychological work, inner work. For me as the deputy on political affairs to think it all over.

Not a single person spoke Spanish.

The main problem was that field training is not that long, so everybody planned to be away from home for two or three months. Now everybody understood this won't be limited to 2-3 months. And people had families – in Volgograd or other places. Every family had its own problems. We couldn't know for how long we would be away! The families were not told anything.

Q. And what did you tell your wife when you were leaving?

A. I said that I loved her and would try to do my bit. Our wives, the wives of the military, are accustomed to sudden twists.

Q. Did you say you were going abroad?

A. No, no. Officers' wives are always ready for sudden turn of events. That's the fate. When we learned we were going to Cuba we understood that we were going close to you, America, our potential adversary. So we are sailing to a place were American imperialists

were trying to liquidate a freedom-loving Cuba, to enslave her. I was really thinking this way!

When I learned of that order in captain's cabin I immediately started thinking: we were not given the packet, the packet was given to the captain. Why captain and not division commander? Have you ever thought about it?

MD: To avoid leak.

A: No, division commander is the Party Central Committee nomenclatura, same as deputy for political affairs. A division has just two positions that were to be confirmed by the Party Central Committee. So we were responsible for the division – and shared it equally, despite my lower rank. So why to captain? First, a captain has unlimited authority on his boat. Second, he is responsible for what has been entrusted to him. Third, the captain is the boss on his boat. The captain is the only one who is armed on the boat – and he is authorized to use his arms at his discretion. Of course, the captain was civilian. He knows the law, visited many seaports, had lots of experience.

[if they had lots of supplies]

No, we had just some – for the first couple of days in Cuba. There were boats with food supplies going to Cuba. Supplying the troops was a huge problem, but we were not to take part in it. It was not our problem.

When I learned we were going to Cuba, I made the worst conclusion: that our going to Cuba may mean war. And not just war, but nuclear war.

Q. Did you know that nuclear missiles would be brought to Cuba?

A. No, nobody knew about it except for those who were in charge of these missiles.

Q. And when you already were in Cuba?

A. No. We could guess it. Nobody spoke about it.

What was the task of political worker? It was to explain to everybody, Voronkov including, the nature of the task, the necessity.

You could hear questions like, “Why on Earth Cuba?” I had to answer it so that he would believe me.

[The task of his PVO division] To provide cover from air for the troops in Cuba, both Cuban and ours. There were two PVO divisions, and the task read, “to cover troops from attack of US planes.”

For this purpose there was sm-75 – to shoot down US planes.

Q. Your main focus were high-flying planes?

A. Any kind of planes. The low planes could be shot down by Cuban PVO, but our targets were modern planes – the Phantoms, U-2s.

Our actions in Cuba were limited by a very strict order from Moscow: not to open fire against US aircraft without permission from Moscow.

Q. When was that order dated?

A. All the time.

Q. But when first?

A. As soon as we came to Cuba, we were told not to open fire on our own.

Q. Was it a written order?

A. We are not bureaucrats. Most instructions were oral – to be later written down somewhere. The purpose was not to aggravate the situation. How would our command not limit us.

Q. When you came to Cuba, where were you quartered?

A. Cuban authorities provided us facilities for quartering. The HQs were quartered in vacant facilities, small houses, and the troops on open terrain, out of the limits of townships and villages, where you could dig trenches. Have you ever seen 'raketnuyu ustanovku'? This is a huge foundation pit, around 10 meters in diameter. [looking up the book] The HQ of the division was at Camigüey – a beautiful city! This is in the middle part of Cuba. We lived on some villa, abandoned after the revolution. And division's HQ was in a church, there used to be some church school.

There was another PVO division – quartered right near Habana.

Q. Which of the two divisions was better?

A. Ours, no doubt.

A division numbers – I don't remember exactly – the full-scale division with aviation is 3,000 – 4,000 strong. Ours didn't have aviation, just regiments. The most important weapon we had was sa-75s. I was visiting every battalion, every platoon. At most, I stayed 7 days a month at the division HQ. I was driving around like hell.

Q. What kind of relations did you have with Cubans?

A. Excellent. Having quartered in Camaguey we had very clear instructions on how to behave. The point was not to add to Cuban problems with our presence. Including food supplies. I was told that Nikita Sergeevich said, "Let your troops not cost the Cubans even one copeck!" All supply should be at the cost of the Soviet state, by boats. Food, etc. But since the Cubans are very kind they would bring us themselves the citrus fruit, oranges, bananas – as to friends, free of charge. But not rum and not wine.

Q. What was the drinking rule in Cuba?

A. Nothing. How could we drink so close to you when we were to be ready to fight any minute! During WWII they gave 100 grams in Winter – following instructions from commander-in-chief. In Summer – only on the days of heavy fighting. It was reasonable.

Of course, the officers got some amount of money to buy cigarettes, water, and sometimes they would buy liquors, it was banned and was punished severely.

I think I was given 100-120 pesos a month, as an officer, incl. division commander. Junior officers got less and the soldiers even more less.

For 100 pesos you could buy beer, cigarettes, may be a bottle of some Baccardi, some gift for wife when we were leaving. If you didn't spend your pesos, you could put it on your account.

Q. On exchange of information with the Cubans, especially on radars.

A. Of course we exchanged information on different issues. Intelligence, etc.

The exchange was both on staff level and in cases of troops interaction. For example, commander of our artillery battalion – and commander of the Cuban platoon would be in communication.

Q. So the artillery battalions could be nearby?

A. Yes, nearby. For example, Cuban commanders would come to see us at our HQ daily. Either the Corps commander – he was a legendary man – his name was Pinares [Pinaris?]. The Cubans called him Cuban Vassily Chapayev. He was Fidel Castro's fellow-champion [fellow-in-arms].

[Vassily Chapaev was Red Army commander during Russian Civil War. There was a popular movie about him, the Cubans saw the movie and called Pinares their Chapaev.]

Q. Was Pinares an equivalent of your commander?

A. Above, he was Corps commander. Or it could be Cuban head of staff. We had daily working contacts with the Cuban military.

We understood the need for such a regime – not to open fire against the American U-2s, since this was a directive of Soviet highest authorities.

On 22/23, we turned on the radars. Sm-25s, two rockets in each.

On the morning of 27th, there was great tension because nobody knew what would the Caribbean crises – this conflict – end with. The military wisdom teaches that you have to be prepared for the worst. There was a report of U-2 flying in the area of our responsibility. Each division has its 'responsibility area' – so that was ours. This means that according to all the rules this aircraft must be destroyed. However, there was no authorization [permit – "razdreshenie"] from Moscow.

Q. Where were you at that moment?

A. Korolov was at the command outpost – that is a place in Camaguey that had a firing-chart ["planshet"] and on that firing-chart you could see target # 33. Firing-chart is a huge screen with squares where you can see moving targets. You see moving plane as a light dot on the screen. It's pulsing while moving from south to north.

Q. What was the size of the screen?

A. Huge screen, around 5 meters high and around 10 meters wide. Huge screen, we call it "planshet".

This was at command outpost. So there were two things. The command outpost with officers on duty – round the clock.

The HQ and the command outpost were two different places. Command outpost is a control authority. The command outpost has this firing-chart, communication center – all the telephones, radio stations; officers shift on duty, an auxiliary power station to provide lighting in the absence of electricity supply. The command outpost receives all the intelligence data, and there it is processed, analyzed and conclusions are made.

We had been there overnight, and in the morning, and then we went to the HQ in Camaguey. The second place in Camaguey was the HQ – in 4,5 kilometers away from the command outpost, in Camaguey. The command outpost was on the town's outskirts, in about 1,5 kilometers from the town, where they used to have a sports club for the Cuban elite – before the revolution. It was very well equipped. And HQ was right on town, in the former church.

We used to live at the HQ, have our meals there, when at the command outpost we are only on duty. Officers [on duty] had their meals there, but nobody lived there. The quarters are nearby.

Take Korolev, he used to live at the HQ (he had a bed there), but at that time he was on duty at the command outpost.

So the division commander, chief of staff and me after spending the night at the command outpost, were tired and went to our place [HQ] in four kilometers – to wash and have breakfast.

That was around 8-8.30 am.

Q. Why have you spent all night at the command outpost?

A. Because the situation was tense and the night takes more attention, more responsibility.

Q. But you knew that U-2s came in the day and not at night. They never came at night – and always at the same time.

A. Besides U-2, there were other sources of tension. There is counterrevolution, saboteurs, etc. hence at night, you should keep your hand on the division's pulse at night. Because any attacks, sabotage, all happened at night. And other planes – not U-2 – were coming at night.

Q. You were expecting some kind of attack?

A. All the time. There were cases when American planes – smaller planes – just threw bombs on Cuban sites. Not on ours – but on Cuban. Not far from Habana and other places.

The Cubans – Corps commander and his staff – could come to us at any time, there was an agreement for it. As a rule, we kept at our place with Cubans coming to us. There was no need for us to go anywhere. We had to stay at our own places.

[to the questions if Cubans told them to shoot down planes]

The Cubans did not give us any commands – they were clever people.

Q. But they shoot down themselves?

A. That was their business – they were at home. And we were sort of tenants.

Q. Coming back to the morning of the 27<sup>th</sup>. So you went to HQ. And what happened next?

A. We had breakfast and then received information that there was this U-2 flying and flying – has been flying for rather long time. This plane can fly for around 9 hours. We had data that it could stay up in the air for 9 hours. According to our experts, its maximum flying capacity is 9 hours – if it is just gliding.

MD: [U-2] had been over Cuba for about an hour.

GD: Wrong: more than an hour. We got tired of it! He flew over all of our combat units. It made an overflight, flied over the s-75s, gathering all intelligence, he was going to leave the area of our division, and then we would be unable to shoot it down. We didn't know where it was going.

We reported on this flight to the command outpost of the military group in Habana.

Q. Who reported in particular?

A. Korolev, who was on duty reported to Pliev – and to the division commander.

Q. How did it happen? You had breakfast – and received information.

A. They ask, “Have you reported to the command outpost?” I say, “Yes”. Then the commander takes up the receiver and calls there.

Q. So it was all by telephone? And what kind of telephone was it?

A. Of course, it was a special protected telephone. Not only by telephone – but also by radio transmitter. We had to double everything. The phone was, of course, protected.

Q. So you reported this to Pliev?

A. Yes, but he was not in place – to the central command outpost of the army group. There were Garbuz and Grechko there. And they gave the order to destroy the plane. And we carried out this order.

Q. When was it?

A. At 10.19 the plane was shot down.

Q. However, there are some controversies.

A. In such cases there are always alternative versions. Sometimes it happens that you do not know the truth.

Q. You had been at the command outpost with Voronkov: how was this decision in fact taken? What did you personally see?

A. Important orders are doubled. Imagine, there is an order for a five-minute combat alert. It would first come to the central command outpost and from there – to us in Camaguey. That is

all orders are being doubled. Same way with the order given by Garbuz and Grechko – to destroy target #33. So this order was delegated to the division commander [Voronkov], and the division commander has to carry it out – this is the procedure. So Voronkov has to double this order further down - to his regimen commander – to Guseinov.

S. Ch. [summing up] So first the order comes from Garbuz and Grechko, then it reaches Voronkov, Voronkov has to pass the order to the regimen,

A. [picking up] and the regimen commander - Guseinov – gave an order to artillery battery commander Gerchenov. So it went in four stages.

Q. And what have you personally seen – not what was in the book?

A. I agree with them.

We don't see anything – we only hear information! We don't see the airplane – it's 20 km high! The artillery battery under our command that shot down the plane is in about 200 kilometers from us – if not more.

Q. Meters?

A. Kilometers! The command outpost is at 200 kilometers distance – of even more! There were other artillery batteries near the command outpost. The regimen was in 600 kilometers from the division's HQ! You don't see anything – you just know the information!

Q. But did you hear how the order came from Habana?

A. And how could I hear?

Q. But you were at the command outpost!

A. But I have already left it. I was at the staff. However, there was an officer on duty – he is an official person. He keeps records.

Q. But Voronkov was with you!

A. Yes, with me.

Q. So how did Voronkov receive this order?

A. He gets an instruction...

Q. How – you were nearby?

A. By phone.

Q. So in your presence Voronkov takes up a receiver? And what does he say?

A. He repeats the order: “Yes – to shoot down – target #33 to be destroyed!”



Q. So you were present at the moment when Voronkov received the order?

A. By all means! And he gave an order” “Shoot down the plane!”

Q. So Voronkov takes up a receiver, gets an order and repeats it?

A. Yes.

Q. How many minutes passed between the report to Habana and Habana’s order to shoot down the plane?

A. **Approximately 15 minutes, approximately. It was not immediately.** We expected it would be immediately but it was not. No less than 15 minutes. In such cases each minutes seems like ages!

Q. Where particularly were you at the staff at that moment?

A. It was the room we lived in.

Q. So all the operational communication was there in that room?

A. Sure.

Q. So you are sitting – and he is reporting to Habana?

A. No. The report to Habana was made by an officer on duty at the command outpost – Korolev. This was when we were at the command outpost. And then after we had left we did not know how the situation was developing. We came to our HW to have breakfast and a little rest and then to go back [to command outpost.] And at that moment all this is happening. Voronkov receives a report...

Q. That is Voronkov gets a phone call?

A. Yes, Korolev reports to Voronkov that he received an order

Q. That is Voronkov was not in direct communication with Habana – Korolev is in direct communication?

A. For some time yes – when the command “destroy target 33” arrived. This order was received by Korolev.  
But we reported this information [of U-2 entering their zone] – we reported it to Habana.

Q. When you were back at the command outpost?

A. Of course – that’s the procedure. Information on the situation is always sent to the central command outpost. As soon as we spotted the plane, we immediately reported it to the central command outpost. And they also have same type of firing chart – and are also tracking the target.

So it was flying for a rather long time.

Q. Next you go to your HQ. How long does the trip take?

A. 8 minutes.

Q. You come to your HQ – and how long it took for Voronkov to get a call?

A. I don't remember. We had time to eat. As soon as we had eaten, there was this call from Korolev transmitting the order to destroy target 33.

Voronkov did not stop managing his division. When going to the HQ to wash and shave he did not turn himself off [the situation] – he just physically left the place. It's just 6 minutes to get there, moreover in the morning with the roads empty.

Q. Did Voronkov have mobile communication with him?

A. No, no mobile communication. The phone and radio station were at the place we lived in. When we arrived [at HQ] in 6 minutes, he called to ask what was happening. They said, "Still flying." Then we had meals, and got that order afterwards. So Voronkov was continuously managing his division. It was nothing like Voronkov interrupted control and left.

I'll even tell you more. **Garbuz and Grechko were at the central outpost in Habana.** And General Pliev was not there – and he should not have been there. He might be there in the evening, then went to his HQ – and HQ had communication line and he was minding his business...

MD. Sleeping!

A. Or taking a bath. Real operations are at the central command outpost with its officer on duty and two generals.

The difficulty – tragic feature – of these actions was that it happened with Moscow being unaware.

Q. So you think the tragedy was that Moscow didn't know?

A. Yes, I think so.

If Kennedy had reacted differently [to U-2 shoot down] there would have been war. So Kennedy demonstrated great wisdom.

Moscow - neither Khrushchev, nor Malinovsky – gave order to shoot down the plane. Fidel Castro – God bless him – did not give any order to shoot down the plane. He did not interfere into combat affairs. He might be glad that the spy plane was punished, but he did not take part in it.

Our staffs acted autonomously, of course, in coordination with the Cubans. However, Cuban leadership never interfered with any military question.

Q. And did he [Pliev] know?

A. No. he was very sick – he had kidney [problems.] He left – and at that moment the plane. They call him, and his aide-de-camp says, “He has just fallen asleep.” Shall I wake him up to report on the plane?

The two generals decided not to wake up comrade Pliev. They were not kids – they were generals! They take a decision – and are responsible for it.

Q. But an order from Moscow was NOT to shoot down?

A. So they took responsibility upon themselves. The question is why they did it?

Q. What do you think - why?

A. I think that in those conditions one we could have lost orientation. Combat situation is tea in a saucer – you blow – and it’s cooled. [the situation] is fluctuating. You don’t know what are the plans of your enemy, what he is up to. I’m talking of myself and Voronkov: we lived together, worked together, argued, agreed. Two men sharing single room, working side by side. And what happened? As we believed, the tension loosened a little: we were getting rumors, listening to foreign radio stations – English language – we had a translator. But you did not know if that was so. Nobody told us on the 16<sup>th</sup>: There won’t be war, we are coming to accord. There was no such a conclusion between Kennedy and Khrushchev. Then this plane comes on the 27<sup>th</sup>. It flew over our military positions, photographed it all and now is flying away – out of our reach. You think, why would this plane do it when the crises has eased? What is the goal of this reconnaissance?

MD: But it was not the first time – they have been flying for 2 weeks!

A. Because commands from Moscow were constantly changing. There was a command: “Open fire in case of a manifest attack”. It was not a clear one. I may assume this is not an attack, and you may assume that it is.

Q. When did this order arrive?

A. Around the 26<sup>th</sup>, I think.

Where there is such great tension between the two superpowers, why should there also not be confusion at the division level? What did they know?

They did not punish Voronkov later. In case of punishment, I would be punished more than he would. There was a tradition in the Soviet Army: to punish the chief of political department more than the commander. That was a stupid tradition. During WWII, I was commander of anti-tank artillery battalion – I was destroying German tanks.

Q. Where you punished?

A. Thank God, neither me, nor Voronkov were punished. God blessed us.

Q. What kind of man was Voronkov?

A. He was a clever man, nobody would deny it. He was a clever man. Is this enough?

Q. Not quite.

A. I understand that not quite.

Q. Did you get along well?

A. Yes, but later the relationship became less warm.

Q. After that episode?

A. No, two years later.

After that airplane [U-2] episode we shared the same apartment, then our family were on close terms, we visited each other, spent time together with our families. That was after we got back to Volgograd. You know, we say that in case of a deceased person you either say good things – or nothing.

Q. Back in that period your relationship was good.

A. Yes, perfect.

[describing Voronkov's appearance]

He was tall, a little pot bellied, but within limits. He was a head taller than I am. I can bring you photos – I just had no time to pick them up.

Q. Were you glad you shot down U-2?

A. Of course, it's not such a simple thing to shoot down a plane.

Q. So people were happy?

A. Without doubt. The people fulfilled their task – that's it. Gerchenov and others should not have shudders at the thought that they shoot down U-2. They had an order to shoot it down – and should have been glad that everything went O.K.

Q. What kind of man was Gerchenov?

A. He came from another regimen - our division had been manned with two different units. He was a fine man, very clever, reserved, kind. The soldiers loved him – this is the main measure of a commander.

[talking of KGB – how many per division]

For three regimens – six – seven or may be eight men. I was always on very good terms with these authorities [“s etimi organami”.]

Q. Did they interfere into your work?

A. No, they didn't.

Q. What happened with your division afterwards?

A. We had all been scattered throughout the country. For many, there was not enough positions in Volgograd and they had to take early retirement [into Army reserve].

Q. Did you get any awards?

A. We were awarded rather modestly. Voronkov and I were decorated with the Order of the Red Star. But I don't keep any grudge.

I'd like to add that in a day or even less, there was a cable from Comrade Malinovsky that read, "You've hurried a little. " I am not sure if these are the exact words – I did not read it. Figure out what did he have in mind – who can explain what did this cable mean? [laughing]

Indeed, there was some confusion. With confrontation tending to ease, there should have been clear instructions what to do in such situation.

Provided we had not shot down the plane, what could happen next? It could gather the latest data, Andersen would have brought it to his commanders, and in some time, following on these recently detailed data, the United States would strike a precise blow against our division. Nobody had given us a guarantee that the conflict would be soon over.

Then, there were Garbuz and Grechko who were in Habana which is closer to high authorities. So there might be another outcome. Since the crises subsided, there would be no war, and hence Andersen's data would be no more relevant.

I am very sorry for Andersen – it was no fault of his. And I am very sorry for his family and his daughter. Under a different scenario, he would have come back. However, nobody knew at that time that there would be no war.

Garbuz was a brigade commander.

Courageous, emotional. He liked poetry, especially Pushkin, and liked to recite poetry by heart. He knew lots of poetry by heart.

Q. Could Korolev write a diary?

A. KGB people wouldn't know everything. We were two – three men in a room. We [VOrontsov and I] shared the room just for the two of us. There were just the two of us who were responsible to the Central Party Committee.

Korolev shared a room with one or two persons. He was not alone. So he would just sit down and write – we didn't control each other. If KGB wanted to check, there were ways to hide [diary] safely so that nobody would find it. Or he could just keep it with him.

Head, division special department [osobyi otdel] Lieut. Colonel Plizh – a very decent and honorable man. He died in Volgograd.

After Cuba I came back to Volgograd. After Volgograd I got to Kolsky Peninsula, North.

Among our people, there are many people of natural gifts. [In Cuba] Captain Kandebarov who was the head of officer's club mastered Spanish within a month. And he was our translator. Then over 3 to 5-6 months he came to understand Cuban culture very well. He learned the language and even dialects so well, that the Cubans wouldn't believe he was Russian. He was one of our officers. He died in Volgograd.

Q. Why didn't Voronkov like that you were learning Spanish?

A. I don't know. He said, we had a translator and that's it.

[Question if Russians married Cubans]

A. No, there was a ban. There were no written orders, but there was an oral instruction.

Q. And what about women?

A. Also no.

[back to U-2 episode]

In combat situation there is nobody near the launcher – people have to leave so that not to get burns. They have done their work and the missile is now in the launcher. There is an electrical supply system, cable going to the control cabin. The control cabin is in 100 or may be more meters - and there they press the launch button.

Q. Have you been there?

A. I now don't remember if this cabin was in the center or not. We tried to make our combat formation to correspond to existing instructions. It is possible that it was in the center, but that was not always possible due to landscape.

There are two people in the cabin, one is a sighting [homing] officer [ofitser navedeniya] – and they are both within this circle.

Q. So within this circle you have a number of different control cabins?

A. Sure. There may be 3 or 4 cabins, depending on the equipment.

Q. So, an order comes: "Shoot down the target."

A. It would come to Gerchenov, artillery battery [division] commander. Gerchenov would receive all the data. And he would himself determine when to launch – according to this intelligence.

And Gerchenov is in the same control cabin with the sighting [homing] officer who controls the missile launching.

S.Ch. 'Ofitser navedeniya' is sighting, targeting or homing officer.

Q. What happens next?

A. Afterwards they would clean up the launching device, remove all the dirt, put it back to order after launching, because there is dirt, smoke and fire.

Q. What happens before the launching? Here they receive an order – combat ready # 1.

A. Usually, the launching device is situated in the position – with the missile – over there on a special vehicle. After combat ready # 1, the vehicle moves up to the launcher, and the missile is put on the launcher [‘nakladyvaetsya na puskovuyu ustanovku’.] There is a special mechanism to put the missile on the launcher. So the missile moves – or drives - onto the launcher and is then fastened there automatically. Next, the launcher raises the missile into a necessary angle – so that to hit the airplane.

As a military man, I was always looking forward a worse outcome – that there would be war and I would have to take part in it.

Q. So you were ready to fight Americans?

A. Not only me, but all our soldiers. Do you know what one soldier said? He said, “Well, Comrade Colonel, I wish we could put on our uniforms and go fighting.”

The climate was terribly hot – we were not like Cubans [accustomed to it.] So I would drive, say, 200 km, get back to my battalion and would go to get shower. Same way on the way back – it was impossible not to take shower.

I spent no more than 7 days at HQ with 23 among the troops. I was too diligent. I was trying to avoid the shame in case [American] intelligence would try to steal a soldier. Sort of kidnapping. The CIA set a task: to bring one soldier from Cuba to New York or Washington – just to show that we had soldiers there [in Cuba] since we were denying we had soldiers in Cuba. That was what I was afraid of. And I said to the division commander, “Besides getting to jail, we’d take shame.” So my main task was not let steal a single soldier. I was explaining to the soldiers, “Take note, the kidnapers would be sort of professors in their business: clever, strong. Hence don’t go out anywhere on your own. That was my main task after the airplane shoot down. Before it, everybody were preoccupied with work, afterwards all the soldiers wanted was to visit girls [“poiti k devkam”].