

**THE ORAL HISTORY
OF FORGOTTEN WARS**

The Memoirs of Veterans
of the War in

«Memories»

Moscow

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In this collection are presented the memoirs of two officers: first by a retired colonel of the paratroop forces Vyacheslav Mityaev (about the entry of troops into in 1979 and the war in in 1986-1989) and secondly by a senior lieutenant of the reserve Anatoly Alekseevsky (about the war in in 1986-1988).

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PROLOGUE

This collection of memoirs mainly concerns the events in the south of Angola in 1987–1988, namely the attempt by units of the SADF together with combat forces of UNITA to take the town of Cuito-Cuanavale and to dislodge the units of the Angolan army – FAPLA stationed there (which included Soviet military advisers and specialists) as well as the Cuban forces, which were supporting FAPLA.

After the military defeat in March 1988 was forced to make concessions. An agreement was signed, which required the withdrawal of the South African forces form and democratic elections in (which became independent following the elections) in return for the gradual withdrawal of the Cuban forces from .

The collection has been put together by Dr Gennady Shubin from the audio recording of his conversations with officers of the reserve Vyacheslav Mityaev and Anatoly Alekseevsky.

The accounts by the participants of the local wars, published in this collection are seldom known not only by the general public but even by professional war historians.

THE MEMOIRS

of Vyacheslav Aleksandrovich Mityaev,

retired colonel of the paratroops[\[1\]](#)

– **When did you begin your military service?**

– I was conscripted in 1956, in December. I served for a year as a soldier in the paratroops, in the 31st division, 109th paratroops regiment in the town of Aleksandriya of the Krivograd region (). I finished the regiment school[\[2\]](#) with the title “Commander of a recoilless gun **B-10**”. **We called it “82-millimetre 86-kilogram recoilless gun B-10”.**

– **What rank did you receive upon completion of regiment school?**

– What happened was that upon completion of regiment school I was offered to enter the Paratroops Command College [\[3\]](#), and so, not yet having received the rank of sergeant I went away to the military college...

In 1957 I went away to Alma-Ata (former capital of) where I entered the Alma-Ata Paratroops Command College . In 1958 it was transferred to Ryazan’ [\[4\]](#), to the base of the Ryazan’ Infantry College . We studied there for two more years.

After completion the College in 1960 I, in the rank of lieutenant, was sent to serve in in the town of Alitus . I served there until 1966; in 1966 in the rank of captain I enrolled at the Military Academy named after Frunze . At the Academy I studied for three years, finished it in 1969 and was appointed head of reconnaissance of the 103rd Guards Airborne Division in Vitebsk (city in Belarus), where I received the rank of major.

– **Was this front reconnaissance?**

– No. Army reconnaissance. The thing was that in our army the paratroops do not operate near the front line, they are dropped in the rear services of the enemy. Thus our reconnaissance is specialised. It has its own specific character compared to ordinary army reconnaissance and the methods by which it is conducted differ somewhat. When we are dropped we are surrounded by the enemy.

– **Do you reconnoiter the area of the landing first?**

– When later I became the deputy head of reconnaissance within the paratroop forces of the I dealt with the issue of conduct of theatre reconnaissance but we did not carry it out ourselves but sent requests to GRU (Military Intelligence). We compiled layouts of what had to be photographed by satellites.

We drew up layouts for all theatres of military operations, determined the objective area and if this was suitable to be the drop zone we compile a site sketch – photographs at a scale of 1 to 25000 and then a more detailed photograph of the drop zone itself at a scale of 1 to 2000 (20m in 1cm). This data was occasionally updated depending on what installations interested us.

We had catalogues from GRU on all theatres of military operations, which included data on the armed forces, their location and disposition. We thoroughly studied the potential enemy, its armaments and tactics. A reconnaissance man is a multidisciplinary specialist. I finished the Paratroop Command College , then the Frunze Military Academy named after Frunze . And my opinion is: reconnaissance people are people with an active living position. That's why they become generals, heads of divisions and the Commander-in-chiefs of the paratroops forces[5]. A reconnoiterer as a military leader must know how to Command his own forces, thoroughly know the enemy and be able to quickly make the right decision.

– **As they say, don't regard your enemy as a sheep but as a wolf[6]?**

– Yes. We paid a lot of attention to movement operations. The assault force must manoeuvre when it's in the rear of the enemy or it will be overwhelmed.

– **What vehicles should be used to maneuver – the ones that come to land in the rear of the enemy?**

– Both the captured armoured vehicles and the ones they already had.

– **Did BMD-1[7] already exist then?**

– No, not at the time. During the exercises in we were still dropping **ASU-57[8]** **ZPU-4[9]** and **ZU-23-2[10]**.

– **And were they then put on whatever vehicles were found?**

– **GAZ-66[11]** trucks were airlifted for this purpose. The **ZPU-4** guns and the **GAZ-66** trucks were dropped separately. Then the gun was attached to the truck. Also the airlifted version of the **GAZ-66** had an open cabin with a canvas top.

– **And what did you do after serving in ?**

– In 1972 I was transferred to the headquarters of the VDV in Moscow , to the post of senior officer of the reconnaissance branch. Then I became deputy head of the reconnaissance branch and served there until retirement in 1990, after my temporary duty in Africa (in 1986-1989).

– **But you were in as well?**

– In the rank of lieutenant-colonel I was part of a small task group preparing the introduction of troops into in 1979.

We went to 103rd Guards Airborne Division in Vitebsk from where we underwent training.[12] Then we went to the stage airfield on military transport aircraft.

For a whole division you need a lot of aircraft. For one regiment – over 100 airplanes, for the whole division – over 600. These were **Il-76** planes. **AN-12** airplanes weren't used for our group but they were used for others as weren't enough of the **Il-76**. Almost the whole fleet of the military transport aviation was involved (**Il-76**, **An-12** and **An-22** “**Antei**” (Anteus).

We used up all the stage airfields in and Western Siberia . For example we, with our operations group and the division Command, were in Eastern Kazakhstan, near Lake Balkhash . There on the airfield were **MiG-25s** – our interceptors. We landed there for refuelling and Commander of

the regiment complained that we had used up three months' worth supply of fuel. This was December 1979.

After that our operations group flew to Tashkent, to a military airfield and on 23rd of December flew to the Bagram Airbase. The next day we went on **BTR-70**[\[13\]](#) APCs from Bagram to Kabul airbase where we stationed ourselves.

Then our op-group (of the paratroopers) and the op-group of the General Staff settled there. Located there was communications station **Mikron** of the chief military adviser in , an ethnic Tartar, General Muhammedshin.

We stayed in an old café which was once an officers' casino, and got ready for the arrival of our division into Kabul .

And on the 25th of December 1979 the landing of the 103rd airborne division into Kabul airbase began.

An-22 “Antei” flew a lot in . The main aircraft was, of course, the **Il-76** but some “**Anteis**” flew as well. Even before the main events one of them, loaded with munitions, caught the side of a mountain between Bagram and Kabul and exploded. There was an error in altitude of 300 or 400 metres. It' altitude indicator malfunctioned. When we first saw the explosion we first thought it was shot down.

After the first units were unloaded on 25th of December and were combat ready I was given the order to move out using combat vehicles (**BMD-1**) in the direction of Jalalabad for the protection of the airfield there. Kabul is situated in a basin and we set out in its direction. In the same direction about 40-50 km away stood two Afghan tank brigades– the 4th and the 15th. They were armed with **T-55** tanks. And we were moved towards them just in case they tried to attack Kabul . At that moment, for the first in a war, we all became agitated. Now, when there've been so many conflicts, almost all of our army have “smelled gunpowder”. But then, how long had it been since the Great Patriotic War[\[14\]](#), since 1945. All of us had learnt to fight not in a combat situation. Nobody had smelled gunpowder, so to speak, and then suddenly your brains turn upside down – this is serious stuff.

I set a task to the company Commander: “Listen, captain, don't be scared, wait. Organise the defence for each of the paratrooper armoured vehicles (**BMD-1**), set a target. Define the directions of fire and the sectors. The main aim is not to allow a possible penetration by the enemy tanks from the south-east”.

Then, to fight the tanks, the **BMD-1s** were fitted with smooth-bore 73 mm guns (for fire using shaped charge projectiles, which burn through the tank's amour)[\[15\]](#) and **PTURS**[\[16\]](#) “**Malyutka**”. It is only later that they were also fitted with **PTURSS** “**Fagot**” and “**Konkurs**”.

Through the course of 25th and 26th of December 1979 everything went smoothly. We started to freshen ourselves up. On the 27th our 317th airborne regiment was given the task of moving out and stationing itself in the royal palace[\[17\]](#). I was the one from our operations group who was sent to help the regiment Commander.

The entry of our troops was agreed with the Chief of General Staff of Afghanistan Yakub and president Amin in order to assist the struggle against the nomad tribes. We arrived as friends. And then Yakub says: “We asked for one regiment and you sent a whole division”. Doubts suddenly arose in his mind.

Our regiment arrived to the royal palace in Kabul and stationed itself there. We were told that there would be an evening party at the headquarters of the 2nd Afghan army corps, which was nearby. The regiment Commander and I were invited. After a period of time the Commander of the 2nd Afghan corps, the head of communications and two of our colleagues arrived. We were informed that dinner would be served at 1900 hours. Also the Commander of our division and several officers arrived, among them the head of the staff office of our division to meet general Yakub at the office of General Staff of the DRA[18].

Several units were sent to Amin's palace on the outskirts of Kabul for its protection – our 50th regiment of the VDV, Special Forces battalion of GRU Commanded by Major Habib Halbaev (It was known as the Muslim battalion) and a unit of the KGB.

Several units of Special Forces acted with us (I don't know the name of the group – “Alfa” or “Vympel”, they did not flaunt themselves). They were Commanded by General A.I. Lazarenko. Our 50th regiment of the VDV supported the actions of these groups as they seized the palace.

Amin's palace itself lies on top of a high basement. In there was a battalion of Afghan guards, who are very good, having undergone full British special forces training.

At 1800 hours we were told that there will be no evening party, that we must wait for a signal. I and the regiment Commander went to check the disposition, to put the crews of combat vehicles on heightened alert. And as we were getting ready, there was this mishap. A gunner on a **BMD-1** accidentally pressed the trigger mechanism and burst of fire from a **PKT** 7.62 mm machine gun, paired with a 73 mm gun went in the direction of a tower of the royal palace. Officers of the guards of the royal palace came running: “What's happening?” We explained that we fired by accident.

I am walking: a soldier with a “**Muha**” **RPG (RPG-18)** is lying on the ground. The **RPG** is sheathed as it is meant to be during peace-time. I say: “How are you going to fire son? Unsheathe it! Where's your hand-grenade?” Takes it out of his pocket. “And where's the fuse?” “In the other pocket” he says.

I begin to yell. The soldier feels that something serious is brewing, his hands trembling, he fits the grenade and prepares the “**Muha**” having forgot that you first need to expand the tube first[19].

Around 1900 hours it was time **X** – the signal to move was given.

Amin's palace and the royal palace are different things. The royal palace is located in the centre of Kabul, whereas Amin's palace is a residency on the outskirts of Kabul . During the operation of the occupation of Kabul I was situated in the royal palace. We had one regiment. His task included blocking off the 28th Afghan airborne regiment in its barracks and the capture of the staff office of the 2nd Afghan corps and the ministry of communication.

All in all, our regiment very quickly took control of the corps' staff office. The Afghan paratrooper regiment tried to make a resistance but they were all unarmed in the barracks. They tried to get to their weapons store but we made one shot at the roof and it all calmed down. We managed to quickly capture these installations.

The occupation of 2nd army corps' staff office and the blocking of the 28th airborne regiment went virtually without combat and without any losses. The Commander of the 2nd army corps made one shot using an **RPG** at our **BMD-1** from his office. Missed. He was quickly seized, tied up.

When the assault on Amin's palace began our regiment fired on all the entry points, covering the advance. The first to go into the attack was Halbaev's battalion.

The 50th regiment of the 103rd division supported the breach by the Special Forces into the building, the capture of Amin's residency itself. They destroyed the firing points. Fired using the 73 mm guns on the **BMD-1s** on the ground floor where the guards were stationed. And a **PTURS** company was there as well. **RPGs**, machine guns, assault rifles were used. From this company 7 people were killed, in another one 2, overall the first losses in the 50th regiment were 9 people. And the Special Forces suffered significant losses, particularly Halbaev's battalion, which led the assault.

When they broke in Amin's family was there, his daughter tried to shot back, she was injured. Amin tried to get to the bathroom and he was killed there.

– **Who killed him?**

– I can't say for sure.

The Afghans themselves killed Amin's son, who was 14 years old, on the day of the assault so that there would be no heirs on the male line. This was **KHAD** – Afghani counter intelligence. Amin's wife and his two daughters were put in the jail of Puli Charhi[20] in the same cell, where the family of the previous president Taraki was held.

The assault on Amin's palace only ended late the next day[21]. The guards were inside and it was very difficult to eliminate them, whereas our regiment seized all our targets during the night and by the morning everything was calm.

A number reconnaissance and special services personnel operated with us.

In the morning we thought that people would flood the streets. Our **MiG-23** fighter planes were flying on a low-level but at supersonic speeds over the city. But all were quiet. No noise.

The "Vympel" group brought the corps' Commander to be held at our regiment's location. We gave him a separate room. The regiment Commander ordered to put guards next to the door and the windows as well as two men with rifles inside.

I asked the guys from the Special Forces unit: "Have you checked him for sharp objects?" "No".

And I didn't sleep the whole night, kept checking how he was there. But he was just snoring the whole night. Then the next morning people from the **KHAD** counterintelligence arrived. Greeted each other as friends and they took him away.

After the mission was completed I went back to our operations group. After that I was ordered, as if I were a fire crew, to go and find what happened, where there were exchanges of fire...

At night I would drive around Kabul checking the posts. I went around hot-rodding on an "Uazik"[22]. But everything turned out well. I must've been lucky, didn't get into a single ambush.

I went to the place where our specialists were located, to the areas where our advisers lived, checked how their security is organised, went to a car repair centre, where a group of 9 of our

people were. Went over to the Polytechnic Institute were protecting themselves there. And so I spent whole nights running around Kabul .

The new year of 1980. We had just celebrated New Year and suddenly there's an emergency. On the crossroads, on the road from the airport to Kabul city centre you can hear the roar of tanks. We jump out there trying to find out what's happening. Thought that a leading unit from the 4th or 15th Afghan tank brigades broke through into there. I assembled a group of 10 fighters with **RPGs** from the communications centre ran out onto the crossroads. I see **T-62** tanks stopped there. Before trying to get closer, I ran to the "*Mikrorayon*" [\[23\]](#) where our specialists and advisers were located. . The officers, quite tipsy, had just come outside after New Year celebrations. I say: "Guys there's some sort of tanks down here!" "What tanks, there aren't tanks here" they answered. And then the tanks started to roar again.

I returned to my group and set the guys the task of was going to fire on the leading tank, and who on the rear one. The tanks' engines are on, they're very visible. We approached within 50 metres or so. The next thing I see the hatches opening and hear people speaking Russian. I run up to them and tell the company Commander: "I've got my guys keeping a bead on you by now!"

It turned that this was a tank company from the 5th motorized rifle division, I think. They entered Kabul and got lost. Then they left. That was some operation I had organised.

– What Soviet tanks were used in ?

– **T-62**. Good ones for those times. And we didn't have any of the newest military equipment in Central Asia anyway.

There was one other interesting instance. We had received information that there is a possibility of an attack on the residence of Babrak Karmal (his residency was underneath the mountains in the southern outskirts of Kabul), movements of the enemy in the mountains had been spotted. His residency was guarded by the 2nd battalion of the 17th airborne regiment without one of its companies.

General N.N. Guskov (head of the staff office of the VDV) told me: "Go to the 17th regiment, take another company on armoured vehicles (10 **BMD-1s**), drive to the residency and then see how to organise the protection and the defence of the residency, stay there till the morning. If there's a threat of an assault and capture you should use a Tsarandoi [\[24\]](#) **BRDM-2** [\[25\]](#) to take Babrak Karmal under protection to the royal palace.

I drive up to the royal palace. The regiment Commander was already abreast of the situation, he leads the company out. We drive to Babrak Karmal's residency. I gave a task to the senior officer there – use this company only for the protection of the residency and I went to look around: the mountains neighbour the residency. Higher, about 200 metres up the mountain's slope there's a small mosque or something. "We'll put a couple of machine gunners up there" I say. All in all I spent the whole night doing this. I put a **BRDM-2** on the entry to the residency for possible evacuation of Babrak Karmal.

The whole night we waited for an attack and in a way we were even disappointed that it did not take place. Were these just rumours – we don't know.

And another case. We were stationed near a crossroads. A Senior Lieutenant, a bomb technician, and his squad were on duty. There are five-story buildings nearby, but nobody living in them. And then a grenade gets thrown from one of the buildings.

I asked them to send me one squad from the company's reconnaissance platoon to rake through the building. We began with the basement. We went through the whole house. It was good training for the guys breaking down all the doors. It was a good practice of how to sweep a house for reconnaissance people. This was real training.

In Afghanistan it's a very lunar-like nature, lunar landscape, very unlike to Angola. I left Afghanistan on 20th of January 1980[26].

– **What were our forces in Afghanistan armed with at the time?**

– **T-55, T-62 tanks and BMP-1s**[27].

– **And the 103rd Guards airborne division?**

– On the 25th December 1979 (before the events in Kabul) we began to place the planes on the airfield[28]. Out of vehicles we had **BMD-1, GAZ-66** – by and large they usual equipment, including a squadron of **SAU-85** self-propelled guns. Then **D-30** 122m howitzers. **ZU-23-2 AA** mounts. Machine guns, both company and hand-held (**PKM, RPK**). We had the assault rifles – 5.45 mm **AK-74s**.

– **Did you switch to 7,62 mm guns later?**

– Actually, later in Afghanistan they did switch to 7.62 mm **AKM** because the 7.62 mm bullet declared itself better than the 5.45 mm ones. The thing was that the 5.45 mm bullet in the **AK-74** rifle has an offset centre of mass and its precision seems to higher and the damage larger, when hits the target, but even a small grass-blade in its path– and the bullet's direction of flight changes. That's the disadvantage of this calibre. In enclosed terrain, in mountains or in a forest it is very ineffective compared to the 7.62 mm calibre.

– **So in this terrain the 5.45x39 mm calibre, not our invention, as well as the Western 5.56x51 mm is ineffective and you need the old 7.62x39 mm AKM or AK-47, or foreign 7.62x51 mm cartridges for G-3, FN-FAL or M-14 assault rifles?**

– Yes. The Western 7.62 mm cartridges (7.62x51) are a bit bigger than ours, it's like the old rifle cartridge from the **Mosin** rifle (7.62x54), which is used in the **PKM** machine guns. Our 7.62 mm cartridge (7.62x39) for the **AKM** – is shorter than the Western one (7.62x51), but the main thing is to go back to the earlier 7.62 mm calibre.

– **A lot is talked about this at the moment, our machine guns are 7.62 mm – PKM, and to replace it there's the new Pecheneg machine-gun, which uses cartridges for the Mosin rifle, that is already being produced. Also people write that soon a new, much improved version of AKM or similar assault rifle with the 7.62 mm cartridges will be brought into service and the 5.45 mm cartridge would only be used for the AN-94 (“Abakan”) assault rifle already in service.**

– Well, the Special Forces have the **AKMS** assault rifle with a folding stock – a shortened version of the 7.62 mm **AKM**.

So beginning with Afghanistan, we understood that we need to return to the 7.62 mm cartridges and began to swap the **AK-74** for the **AKM**.

– **One military correspondent who had been in both the Chechen wars recounted that when there is an assault on a town or city (for example Grozny) the soldiers would go forward with 7.62 mm AKMs and would carry a 5.45 mm AK-74 on their backs as an extra just in case.**

– I began military service in 1956 when we still had **AK-47s**. It was still secret at the time, we would carry it sheathed. Then came the **AKM, AK-74, AKSU-74**, so many varieties. On the barrel of the **AKM** there's a muzzle compensator, which improves the density of hits.

– **I forgot to ask, the ASU-57 self-propelled light gun, which you talked about earlier, was that a tracked vehicle?**

– Yes. I even did my driver-mechanic exam on it. Thoroughly studied it.

– **Did you encounter it in Africa?**

– There aren't any of them in Africa. If you ever go to Ryazan', there's an **ASU-57** standing on a pedestal outside the VDV Command College.

– **Why isn't there any in Africa?**

– Why have them there? In Africa you need infantry combat vehicles (we had the **BMP-1**) and APCs (we had **BTR-50, BTR-60PB** and **BTR-70**).

– **And BTR-152?**

– I didn't see any **BTR-152s** in Africa. Perhaps they weren't in working order because Cubans dumped a lot of them into Angola in 1975-76.

– **Did you encounter any BMP-2s in Angola, which were supplied only in the 1990s and South African, Brazilian and Portuguese mercenaries fought in them on the government's side?**

– No, there weren't any **BMP-2s** with quick-firing 30 mm gun, but only **BMP-1s** with a 73 mm smooth bore gun, which fired shaped charge mines (similar type to those in grenade launchers, slightly smaller calibre than on the 82 mm **B-10** recoilless gun)...

– **And since we are still talking about hardware, do you remember if the Angolans had any old soviet SU-100 self-propelled mounts with 100 mm guns dating back to the Great Patriotic War, which appeared in Angola in 1975-1976?**

– There weren't any of them left by the time I was there[\[29\]](#).

As I have already said the Angolans had infantry combat vehicles (**BMP-1**), **T-54B** and **T-55** tanks. The Cubans had **T-62s**.

– **T-72s came to Angola much later, in the 1990s?**

– Yes, later.

Artillerywise there were 82 mm mortars, **D-30 122 mm howitzers** and **130 mm guns**.

– **What's a 130 mm gun?**

– **M-46** 130 mm long range drawn gun, with a range of 27-30 km.

The South Africans fired on us with their 155 mm **G-5** and **G-6** guns with rocket projectiles with a 45km range. They ceded us, whereas our 130 mm gun couldn't reach them.

Also they fired on us using **Valkiri**[\[30\]](#) rocket launchers. UNITA forces used the **Grad-1P** portable rocket launcher, placing it on a tripod. South African Buffalo battalion consisted of 10 companies formed according to ethnic backgrounds. Say, Africans, Latin-Americans, Europeans. Companies on combat vehicles, various **BTRs**.

– **And so we have smoothly moved onto the topic of Angola.**

– I arrived in Angola in March 1986.

– **Why was it you that was sent to Angola?**

– At the time our chief military adviser there was Lieutenant-General Leonid Kusmenko, formerly the Deputy Commander of the VDV for combat training. He replaced Colonel-General Konstantin Yakovlevich Kurochkin.

– **There is a swarm of legends surrounding Generals Vasiliy Shahnovich**[\[31\]](#) **and Konstantin Kurochkin**[\[32\]](#). So some western historiography the unsuccessful Angolan offensive "Towards October" in September-December 1987, and the later South African offensive on Cuito-Cuanavale is called the "General Shaganovitch Offensive". In the opinion of the western political scientists and historians "General Shaganovich was a famous chemical expert, who conducted a chemical war against the poor UNITA and South African troops." It is of interest that a general with this surname never even existed! And in dozen of historical books you have this nonsense written!

After Kurochkin the chief military adviser was Lieutenant-General Leonid Kusmenko, whereas the failed operation was planned by Lieutenant-General Pavel Gusev, who replaced Kuzmenko, and the head of staff Major-General Ivan Ryabchenko[\[33\]](#). That's why we want to publish the memoirs of our veterans in Russian and in English translation. Indeed many Russian journalists, especially young ones, and also so called political scientists repeat the information from erroneous western sources without knowing what had really happened[\[34\]](#). We want people to find out at least something from the lips of the immediate participants of these events. The Russian archives will probably be opened in 100 years time, so for now let the researchers rest on the recollections of the witnesses and participants.

– **But I have got carried away.**

– I was invited to Angola by Lieutenant-General Kuzmenko. This was 1986. He came from Angola on leave and proposed that I come there as an adviser to the head of Angolan military reconnaissance. But then our 10th Department of the General Staff won and I was confirmed an adviser to the head of reconnaissance of the 4th military district in Huambo. I was already a colonel then, deputy head of reconnaissance of airborne troops.

I fly in March 1986 and the first impression was the piles of tin cans on the streets.

– **What did you fly on?**

– On an **IL-62**. Non-stop flight. Later I flew on a **Tu-154** with a landing and refuelling in Hungary.

And another impression I got: the part of Luanda, which borders the ocean, with high-rise building, is clean, but further away, the outskirts, were so dirty. By no means a rosy impression about Africa, nothing like a colourful TV programme about African nature. And also it was sultry like a sauna because of the humidity and over 30°C heat. Everyone was soon dripping, very unpleasant.

I reported that I arrived to the adviser to the head of military reconnaissance of the Angolan General Staff. He was from the “strategists” – strategic reconnaissance. That’s one person you definitely didn’t need to send there. You needed military reconnaissance personnel. Overall the selection of military advisers in Angola left a lot to be desired.

My proposals about what advisers to send there were completely different. Afterwards they understood this and the chief military advisers were invited from the VDV. The war in Angola has guerrilla specifics and the tactics of the paratroopers are best suited to guerrilla warfare.

– **Like the French in Algeria and Indo-China and later the Americans in Vietnam: there’s no continuous front line and troops are brought in by helicopters?**

– Yes. Whereas those in the ground forces, who were sent form cadre (reduced strength) divisions^[35] tried to apply linear tactics. But this is totally unsuitable. You need manoeuvres, action on separate axis.

– **So action using not divisions but battalions?**

– Mainly using battalions. There, in Angola, there’s brigade organisation of the army. Brigades are composed of battalions. In one brigade – three battalions. You can specify the structure with Colonel of the reserve Vadim Andreevich Sagachko. He was grateful to me: “You are the first to bring me up to speed”.

When you arrive there you need some time to get to the gist of things: how to organise food, everyday life. The food is radically different.

When I arrived in Luanda from Moscow, the chief military adviser General Kuzmenko told me” “Vyacheslav Aleksandrovich, you are assigned to Huambo. I am not going to insist but I would like you to be sent to the south, to the 6th military district. I would like to have my own representative there. I have one lieutenant-colonel but he’s not really what I’m looking for.” Whereas I, as the deputy head of reconnaissance of the VDV, had a lot of experience by that time. I say: “If I must, I must.” “I am not insisting, of course. In Huambo there’s good accommodation, the town itself, the provisioning is good. One of the places in Angola where it’s pleasant to serve...”

And I served (instead of Huambo) in the 6th district in Menonge, in Cuito-Cuanavale. From Menonge a road went to Longo and then went to Cuito-Cuanavale. I drove down this road many times. The adviser to the brigade in Longo was Lieutenant-Colonel Vadim Sagachko.

Near Cuito-Cuanavale stood the **Pechora**, **Kvadrat** and **Osa-AK** air defence missile systems, and there was an untarred airstrip there. A radio-radar reconnaissance company was deployed in

the area surrounding the airfield[36]. The town itself is located on the junction of the Cuito and Cuanavale rivers. This was comprised of fazendas but not agricultural ones. They were decorated under the Portuguese, who would come here on hunting trips. They would write on the maps "Fazenda – and its name". These neighbourhoods full of cottages, well-furnished. Now the Angolans have let them become run down, the sewerage and the rest of it was broken.

The neighbourhoods were located in very nice places. Cuito-Cuanavale itself, on an elevation next the rivers' junction. Colourful place. The water in the rivers is clear, like distilled water. Of course we had to boil as there were too many living organisms in it. We would fish off boats using fishing rods and worms as bait. The water's very clear and you could see all the different fish – green, red, pink similar size to fish in Russia but the colours are totally different. Predators – tiger fish, it's got teeth like a saw the whole way – We ate the fish, made soups out of it. We celebrated New Year (both 1987 and 1988) in Cuito. This is what we did: we would climb into the Cuito river, the water was very warm. There weren't any crocodiles nearby; they were further upstream in small tributaries. Once we found the remains of an elephant. A pride of lions wandered around near there. You could all kinds of animal life. Because of the war, however, there were very few of them left, only occasional ones. There was lots of fish in the river though. But the locals didn't fish much as there was hardly any male population. They were all mobilized: either for UNITA or for FAPLA. And the rest – the elderly, women, children, they lived off the local garrison. Everyone would go around wrapped in green sheets of cloth. The soldiers would go to them, give them something to eat.

Along the river banks the locals had small plots of cultivated land but they didn't do much agriculture.

The army (FAPLA) was fed using supplies, mainly tinned food from humanitarian aid. And UNITA was better supplied than FAPLA. When reconnaissance men took them prisoners, they had chocolate, patè, tinned ham and sausages.

– Was the canned food coming in humanitarian aid passed its use by date?

– God knows. When you're hungry, you'll eat pretty much anything, especially spicy, very salty canned meat. Everything in the cans was very salty so that it didn't spoil.

And as for events around Cuito-Cuanavale, they did not only take place in March 1988, but earlier as well.

The main event happened in 1987. When arrived in 6th district in 1986, the first district Commander was "Vietnam", a member of the Central Committee MPLA, and then when he left it was "Batista" who became the district Commander. These are their aliases, they like them, for them they are like a second name. They don't even use their real names.

– Do you remember, were you brought into the gist things in Luanda? How did this take, before you were sent to the south of the country, to your place of service itself?

– General Kuzmenko told me: "Think about it. Come back tomorrow, see what you think." I reply: "What is there to think about, it's fine with me!" Two days later I flew out on an **Il-76**. We were flying at an altitude of 10000m, but then we quickly spiralled downwards dropping heat flares as we went. Below us flew an American-made **C-130 "Hercules"**. Don't know who sent it, but it flew everyday and brought in humanitarian cargos.

– Is that with four engines, like an An-12?

– Yes. What’s the difference? On the **An-12** and **An-22** the tip of the blades on the propellers is rounded where as on the **C-130** they are clipped. **C-130** is a good, very reliable plane. And so is our **An-12**. That’s why it’s many of them flying in Africa – **An-12** and **C-130**, even though they’ve been written off.

– **That’s nothing! A notorious Russian arms dealer, formerly a military interpreter, lieutenant of the reserve Viktor Bout together with his brother Sergei in 1993-1995 bought four of written-off An-8s (twin-engine transport planes) from an aircraft factory in an exchange for equipment for the health centre there and also two An-12 (four-engine transport planes) and several smaller planes: An-24 (twin-engine transport planes) and Il-18 (four-engine passenger plane) and a Mi-8 helicopter. And these An-8s are still flying, notably in Equatorial Guinea. The last An-8 was produced in 1960 and it is 2005 now! An-12s are a bit “fresher”, the last was produced in 1973.**

Viktor Bout has been accused of lots of things, especially by France, that he is such and such, been supplying weapons to the brutal regimes in Africa and Asia, not a good person all in all. But now he is “the best friend of the USA”[\[37\]](#) because he’s been transporting equipment, weapons and ammunition for the “valiant” troops of the coalition, which has bogged down in Iraq.

– I remember the twin-engine **An-8s**, I jumped from them in the beginning of the 1960s. There were few **An-12s** then. But **An-8s** were only produced for two years, whereas there were a lot of **An-12s** manufactured. The transport regiments were made up form a mixture of **An-8s** and **An-12s**. **An-12** was the main transport plane before the **Il-76**.

– **Everybody praises the Il-76s and An-12s that they are very reliable. Very many An-12 will soon be pensioned off from the armed forces and will be given to private firms. It will be replaced by modified Il-76s and An-124s “Ruslan”. And as soon as they are pensioned off, half of the An-12s if not more will appear in Africa.**

– The moment I flew into Megonge, the adviser to district Commander, the lieutenant-colonel I mentioned, was leaving. I introduced myself to him, then looked around Megonge, a small place – kind of like a provincial town, more of a village really. I with him drove to the staff office, I introduced myself to “Vietnam”, the district Commander then and to the head of reconnaissance. Next I went to have a look at the Angolan reconnaissance battalion. It was formed out of military reconnaissance companies, armed with **AKs** and **Kalashnikov** machine guns (**AK-47**, **AKM** and **RPK**).

The reconnaissance men lived in a “refugè”, a large dug-out, 2m deep. It had concrete walls, a light sloping roof on top and about a metre gap between the walls and the roof so it’s always windy. There’s no glass in the windows for the light, air ... and mosquitos to get in. There are no beds, everyone sleeps on the floor laying cardboard from broken-up under themselves (like the homeless) and covering themselves with a light duvet. They would put the assault rifle underneath their heads.

They carry around grenades with them too. The grenades mainly weren’t ours but there were some Soviet **F-1s**.

The UNITA soldiers had our assault rifles and the hand grenades were small, round, American-made I think.

I began to work with the reconnaissance battalion, helped them to organise training. Taught them how to set up ambushes, carry out raids, how to move about, how to sneak up on somebody, take out the watchmen, transport the prisoners.

– **Was there any hand-held night vision equipment?**

– Only night sights for the assault rifles and machine guns. One sight per squad. All the instruments would break down quickly because of the severe climate and negligent treatment. The only things that held together well were Kalashnikov assault rifles and Kalashnikov machine guns.

– **Were any rifles and carbines used?**

– No. FAPLA only had Kalashnikov assault rifles and machine guns.

Once I went and asked the fighters: “Show me you weapon. When did you last clean it?” “We never cleaned them. They shoot fine as they are! (laughter)” they never cleaned their guns, never greased them with oil.

– **So old rifles and carbines were sometimes with UNITA but never FAPLA?**

– Yes.

– **Did you encounter any PPSH-41 (Shpagin submachine gun) and the Degtyarev hand held machine gun captured from UNITA?**

– Didn't see any.

– **Colonel Sagachko recounted in his memoirs that among the Mauser and Mosin rifles seized from UNITA they occasionally met the PPSH-41 sub-machine gun as well.**

– Didn't encounter it.

– **And who was your translator?**

– Oh, we had some translators. They frequently changed. Aleksei Pobortsev worked an awful lot with me. He works as a correspondent for NTV[\[38\]](#) now. You often see his reports from various hotspots.

– **For long did you train the reconnaissance battalion?**

– I went there every day. Then from May 1987 the preparation for the operation in Cuito-Cuanavale. They were transferred there. Maybe you have heard that several of our petrol tankers were destroyed? This happened in 1987, prior to the operation, can't remember exactly whether it was May or June. This column had been made ready, it arrived in Menonge, and it was accompanied by the 5th Angolan brigade and another brigade (I've forgotten its number).

– **How many petrol tankers were there on the “road of life”?**

– The composition of the column was as follows: 23 large semi-trailer tankers, 18 of them with diesel and 5 with petrol. About 10 tankers were burned down. They were incinerated on the route from Longo to Cuito-Cuanavale, around midway. It's only 190 km. Out of these about a 100 are

from Megongo to Longo and 90 from Longo to Cuito-Cuanavale. Later I came from Cuito-Cuanavale to get food stuffs and saw their twisted wreckage[39].

– **Was this a UNITA ambush or an attack by the SAAF?**

– No aerial attack, just a UNITA ambush.

As the brigade moves on the road, the guards move on both sides along the road and the vehicles follow them. And so when Angolan brigades moved out, we were situated halfway between Menonge and Longo, where the column stood. Everything was ready. Our Command post was in Menonge, on the airfield. The op-group kept radio contact with the column.

– **How many tanks were there in this column?**

– Can't remember. The brigades escorted the petrol tankers on foot, without much armoured vehicle support as the road went through the savannah. The surrounding area could be easily combed.

– **How did the UNITA forces get through to the column?**

– I must say that the Commanders of the Angolan really missed the bus. Indeed sometimes ambushes are organized as follows: The UNITA fighters see the cordon and go deep into the savannah. Then, when the cordon has moved on they move out and strike.

First they blew up several landmines. This stopped the column, and then they hit the tankers using **RPGs**. Furthermore it is difficult to distinguish the UNITA men. They are all dressed the same – in FAPLA camouflage. And the weapons are the same – **AKs, RPKs and RPG-7s**.

When the head of reconnaissance and I found out that an attack on the column had taken place we flew out on a Cuban **Mi-8** helicopter. We flew at low altitude-no more than 100m. As we flew past Longo there was just black smoke all across the horizon, you couldn't see anything. As soon as we flew up to the edge of the smoke: there's gunfire on the ground.

– **So the convoy lied down and a fire fight began?**

– Yes. Several tankers with diesel had burned down. The tankers were large, on separate trailers, about 30 tonnes or so. The trucks were of various types.

– **It's hard to imagine what the smoke there must've been like?**

– It was terrible! We want to rise higher in the helicopter, but the Cubans didn't have the resolve to do it, you couldn't see anything. We flew about a bit over the edge of the smoke and returned to base.

The FAPLA losses were small. It was mainly the tanker drivers that had been killed. The ones that managed to jump out of the cabins survived.

We had sustained significant damage. Lots of fuel for armoured vehicles and trucks was destroyed just as they were being prepared for the upcoming operation. But the operation still took place.

– **Did the UNITA men get away?**

– The UNITA men burned down several tankers using **RPGs** and then they left having completed their mission. They were personally ordered to make one shot each and then leave. Some of them opened fire covering the others' retreat but then they left as well.

And you can't see anything in the savannah anyway. We fought lots in there but we had never come face to face, the terrain is enclosed. None goes into bayonet charges there. They can't see each other, only hear each other's fire. They return fire in the direction of the sound of fire. And offensives are conducted in the same way.

– **So there's no close contact, only medium distance gunfights so combat took place at a distance of several hundred metres?**

– Yes. The Angolans hear gunfire and run off. They aren't really doughty warriors. Angolans were terrified of the South Africans! When we (16th, 21st and 47th brigades)[\[40\]](#) went on a three month offensive head Cuito-Cuanavale towards Jamba many Angolans would run away as soon as the South Africans moved forwards.

– **When did the “Towards October” (“Salute October”) offensive begin?**

– We always advanced during the dry season, which begins in May. We began the offensive around July. Three Angolan brigades took part in the advance. We went on foot with **BTR-60PB APCs** and small **Engesa**[\[41\]](#) trucks with supplies of food, ammunition and fuel. The tanks remained in their positions in front of Cuito-Cuanavale. Then the brigades went each in a separate direction.

– **The offensive on Jamba, Savimbi's**[\[42\]](#) **capital lasted three months?**

– We didn't reach it. We went up to the Lomba River. Altogether there were several of such operations, and always they finished on this river they wouldn't allow us to go any further. For three months we gradually moved forwards, with skirmishes, checking for fields as well. As soon as the Angolan troops reached the river, straight away the South African army would come into action, especially the Buffalo battalion. The SAAF would begin its attacks – the **Mirage F1** fighter-bombers and the **Impala** attack aircraft. Pilotless reconnaissance planes were used as well. One such reconnaissance plane, which was reconnoitring the brigades' positions, was found in the area around the bridge in Cuito-Cuanavale.

– **Did the South Africans get involved only when there was a direct threat to Savimbi's patrimony?**

– Yes. They wouldn't allow beyond the Lomba river. The South Africans would counter-attack using **AML-60** and **AML-90 APCs**, **Elephant** tanks.

– **Do you remember anything in particular?**

– Well, I didn't go in the leading groups. Substantial firefights took place there. One of our translators, Oleg Snitko, lost an arm. The Cubans evacuated him on a helicopter with a doctor but sadly he died.

The Cubans didn't take part in this offensive. They remained in the positions near Cuito-Cuanavale.

– **When did the South African counteroffensive begin on this occasion?**

– Sometime in October 1987 the Angolans crossed the Lomba River but the South Africans launched a powerful counteroffensive and our forces (the Angolans) were forced to retreat. The South Africans didn't chase the Angolans for long. They didn't cross the Lomba river. I was there during all of that period from around May 1986 till 1989. The Command post of our "advisees" (the Angolans) was in Cuito-Cuanavale. We had a small site there: canopy, sauna with eucalyptus branches, a small hiding-place – a trench covered with the metal floor from an **Engesa** truck on top.

South African artillery fired on us with 155 mm shells (**G-5** gun and the **G-6 SP** gun, with a range of 39-47km), whereas our artillery **BM-21** (20km range) couldn't reach them.

– **Were there any "Uragan" (hurricane in Russian) multiple launch rocket systems in Africa, which have a radius of up to 35km?**

– No. But even the "**Uragan**" would not have reached the **G-5s** and **G-6s** (range of 39km using ordinary shells and 47 km using rocket projectiles).

While the brigades made their advance we were in Command post in Cuito-Cuanavale. And the South Africans fired using 155m shells, of course mainly on the airfield which was their primary target. The whole of Cuito-Cuanavale was blitzed. All the houses were battered because of the minus and plus rounds.

When the South Africans started to find the targets, the Angolans were the first to get out the way of the artillery bombardment and relocated the Command post to a forest near Cuito-Cuanavale. They fitted out some dugouts there. Then the Cubans also left for the forest, whereas we continued to stay in Cuito-Cuanavale. No one organized anything for us. All we had was our little hiding-place.

I remember that once a shell hit the Angolan staff office, next to it was our hut. And shrapnel from the remains of the shell pierced the wall of our hut. It was made out of light wooden structures like all the houses in Cuito-Cuanavale. The shrapnel pierced the wall of the dining room where all of us were resting and the troop service adviser Colonel Gorb was sitting at the table writing a report. The fragment hit the fridge, don't know how it managed to miss him.

Colonel Gorb was killed a month later. An artillery strike began; all of us go into the hide-out, start playing dominoes. We took it in turns to keep watch but the guards were Angolan. Andrei Invanovich Gorb was meant to go out on watch to instruct the guards. He was sitting next to our sauna under the canopy, where we carried out political lessons, did sport – the sports' equipment stood there. All of this was in a confined space, no fence around it though. The guards came on duty at night; they weren't there during the day. We all went into the hide-out, tell him: "Let's go". He said: "I'll must instruct the guards and come in then". Then suddenly a **Valkiri** shell exploded nearby! It flew in through the roof of the canopy. We get out of the hide-out straight away, a **GAZ-66** stood just outside it. I look under the truck and see a man lying there. I run up to him. Colonel Gorb looked perfectly fine but one of the balls^[43] hit him in the throat, in the carotid artery. We carried him into the hut, the doctor immediately began to help but he died in front of my very eyes. Then I closed his eyes.

Shells landed around our hut so many times. Once a shell landed when I was running into the hide-out and a small, spent piece of shrapnel hit me on the leg. And nothing – just a small scratch.

I remember the bombardment like they were today. Once we were driving from the area where dugouts were to the Command post, still in Cuito-Cuanavale. We are driving in on the **BMP-1** into the zone of the Command post and then a shell hits all of a sudden. The Command platoon was to the right of me, 22 people were killed. But in my **BMP-1** I just heard bits of shrapnel rattling against the armour.

I parked the **BMP-1** and went to the Command post; the artillery bombardment continued. In the car park an **Engesa** truck with an Angolan soldier inside stood next to the **BMP-1**. One shell hit the corner of the Command post dugout, but didn't really damage anything. I finished my work, come outside but the **BMP-1** isn't there – the Angolan driver drove off somewhere. And where I had left the **BMP-1** I see a destroyed **Engesa** with the dead Angolan driver inside; his stomach mangled by the shrapnel. Had the driver-mechanic of the **BMP-1** not driven off the shell could've hit it and nothing would've saved it.

This was how everyday day work, frequent shelling. The South Africans watched when we drove out to the Command post; they had a visual and acoustic surveillance.

We noted that when we left for the Command post the shelling would begin. Our “*zampolit*”^[44] was wounded in his leg. And my reconnaissance battalion was frequently shelled. Once a shell hit us and two men were killed.

The South Africans pounded us using **G-5** and **G-6s** for days on end! You had the double shell bursts. When there was a minus or a plus round as the shell flies over your head you hear the first rumble and then the second as the shell hits the ground. When the two coincide, then it's “your” hit; it must've exploded over your head or somewhere nearby. Awful noise! So many shells and every day.

– **Were they trying to destroy the three installations you talked about?**

– Yes. And the Command post as well. When the Command post moved to the forest they constantly bombarded the three remaining installations: the airfield, the radar reconnaissance company and the squadron of anti-aircraft defence systems.

– **The 1987 offensive, as is known, ended with the Angolans retreating, having suffered large losses, in November-December if I am not mistaken.**

– Yes. The rainy season begins in November. All operations were carried out in the preceding half a year when there isn't a single cloud in the sky. Then we left for the forest and built some dugouts there, but the South Africans pounded us there as well.

– **And when did the Cubans move there?**

– They stationed themselves in the forest earlier.

– **I mean when did they move from the positions where they stationed for many years to Cuito-Cuanavale in order to defend it?**

– They were located there for a while; initially they stayed on the other Western side of Cuito-Cuanavale, on the other side of the Cuito river relative to us. They had defensive positions fitted there. And since Cuito-Cuanavale lies on a hill we could see very well how they were being shelled.

Moreover the Angolans occupied the front positions whereas the Cuban **T-55** stood, buried turret-deep in the ground deep in the defensive positions.

– **The Cuban T-62 tanks appeared later when the main action started?**

– I have a film somewhere, which shows that column of **T-62s** arriving. They were brought on trailers from the nearest port.

– **Some said that they arrived under their own power?**

– On the film I've got, when we met them, they arrived on trailers.

– **In what month did they arrive?**

– Can't remember exactly, everything's got mixed up in my head because later there was the offensive in 1988.

– **How many extra Cuban troops were transferred to Cuito-Cuanavale in early 1988?**

– There was a tank battalion there. The Cubans didn't have any reserves in the rear and all the Cuban troops stood in defence in front of Cuito-Cuanavale.

– **Back to the Cuban T-54B and T-55 tanks. How many tanks were there in total?**

– God knows[\[45\]](#). Can't say for sure.

I remember that when the tanks were crossing to our side of Cuito the bridge was bombed[\[46\]](#). Later it was being repaired, reconstructed.

– **And the number of the new T-62 tanks?**

– A battalion, about 30, no more.

– **Did the South Africans, together with UNITA, try to occupy Cuito-Cuanavale on 11th of March 1987?**

– When I was there they didn't occupy Cuito-Cuanavale, in my time, 1986-1989, there wasn't any occupation of the town.

– **The South Africans brought in their troops, extra tanks and then on 11th of March together with UNITA went on an offensive. But on the mine fields they lost five Elephant tanks, a version of the English Centurion.**

– They advanced but they couldn't get through the Angolan-Cuban defence.

– **When talking about this everyone Fidel Castro: "The South African aviation could not operate because of the bad weather, but instead the South African tanks were in the air".**

– He mocked the South Africans who conducted an offensive in March, still the rainy season, and couldn't victoriously finish it supposedly because of the bad weather, which prevented their aviation from operating.

When the South African tanks were put out of action by the mines[47], the Cubans took one of them and afterwards everyone was taking photographs of themselves against it in the background. It's a massive thing that tank, very tall.

– **Do you remember when the shelling of Cuito-Cuanavale stopped?**

– The South Africans kept firing on us. The shelling only began to stop sometime in the end of 1988[48]. Actions of small enemy groups and armed engagements continued. Fire fights and bombardments using mortars still arose. UNITA later used the **Valkiris**. As well as the South Africans shelled us from far away, the artillery bombardments from 155 mm **G-6** howitzers continued.

During the three years serving in Angola I returned on leave only once. During my time in the 6th district three Soviet groups and three of the Angolans has changed. The district Commanders and chiefs of staff changed as well. When new ones came I was one of the people who brought them up to date on the situation. After a year of service I was already an old-timer, knew the whole situation clearly as I worked with the maps. We intercepted UNITA's radio conversations in Portuguese, received reconnaissance information. My radio operators knew the UNITA working frequencies off by heart as they weren't changed that often and we were listening to them all the time. There were a lot of conversations between the different UNITA units, the enemy's reconnaissance, their battalions. They conducted open transmission on English-made **Rocal** radio transmitters, didn't encrypt them.

We had **Rocal** transmitters as well. Excellent radio transmitters, better than ours. Compact, small, portable.

Once the head of the operational department of the Angolan General Staff General "Ngongo"[49] came to visit. I was working with the head of the staff office, bringing him up to date with the situation (this was the fourth chief of staff in the district in my time there, an Angolan colonel). I am explaining what the situation is like around Menonge, around Cuito-Cuanavale. Ngongo asks: "Who's this (about me)?" All of them speak good Russian. The Commander answers: "This is the adviser to the head of reconnaissance". "Why is he with the chief of staff?" The Commander answers: "He works with everybody here: with me, the operations officer, the chief of staff, the head of reconnaissance".

When an operation finished all of our advisers would be replaced. And then two weeks later we would get a directive from the Angolan General Staff to put together a report on the operations. What to do? "Vietnam" came, he was already serving in the General Staff and asked to compile a report on an operation.

Being a staff officer it wasn't a real problem for me. I was always informed on the situation. I wrote a large report and the operations officer, an Angolan captain, translated it into Portuguese. The report's plan: the aim, intentions and passage of the operation; use of brigades, battalions; use of artillery; use of aviation; use of engineer troops. And one chapter in the report on the actions of the other side, that is the enemy.

For around two weeks we were sitting down with "Vietnam" compiling the report[50]. We taught them how to write reports.

Then "Vietnam" delivered the report in the General Staff as he was the one responsible for the operation. He asked me when I was leaving. I answered that I was going in a few months time.

He proposed that I stay and lengthen my mission. He said that they need qualified advisers like me.

Constantly, every day, I went to exchange information with the Cubans. They had much better information than the Angolans. They sent out own reconnaissance units.

– **Did their reconnaissance units operate together with SWAPO in Namibia?**

– I don't know that. But SWAPO didn't operate with us, they were located in the 4th district, to the south of Huambo. One of their reconnaissance adviser was my former subordinate, Alexander Vasilievich Veres. He went to Angola before me. He returned when I went there. Now he lives in Grodno, in Belarus. We finished the Military Academy together.

– **And what about the operations of 1988 and 1989?**

– A guerrilla war, as before. UNITA shelled Menonge using 82 mm mortars. My wife could tell you about that. She came to visit me half a year after I started serving in Angola in 1986.

Then, after I left, they carried an operation for the liberation of Mavinga and our military engineer, Lieutenant-Colonel Nikolai Kalinin, went together with the Angolan forces beyond the Lomba River. You should ask him about those operations.

– **And the Cubans, under Cuito-Cuanavale were they Commanded by the Brigade General Ochoa[51]?**

– Yes.

There was the Menonge “Provincial” (head of the province), one of the old guard. When my mission in Angola came to an end, he invited me and gave a local musical instrument, a kind of a drum, as a present.

I returned to Moscow in March 1989, after three years of service in Angola and straight away began to arrange my retirement. I was, however, offered the post of a civil specialist – assistant to the head of reconnaissance. The head of reconnaissance was persuading me – come on, you can work for a bit longer. But I was fed up with everything and decided to move to the village where my mother was from, in the Ryazhsk district of the Ryazan' region. We were very active there. First we bought one piglet. Soon we had five pigs, then got a calf as well. Later I bought a separate house, but we decided not to have any cattle; had about twenty sheep though, two hundred birds-geese, chickens, turkeys. It was a nice place I had, a meadow in front of the house, wonderful woods nearby.

I was registered in Moscow, but lived in the village, only came to Moscow to get my pension. Lived like that for 11 years.

But in 2001 I moved back to Moscow. My children said: stop messing around, come back (laughs). And so I was forced to come back. Sold off everything, just have the house there.

Nowadays I constantly go walking in the Izmailovsky park, but don't go to the village any more, although I did go in my first year after returning to Moscow.

My two grandsons are 15 years old. The daughter and her son live on the Novorizhskoe highway outside Moscow, they have a cottage in Archangelskoe, near the CSKA base. My son and grandson live with me.

Additional information on Colonel V.A. Mityaev:

315 parachute jumps, 8 of them from an aerostat, the rest from planes: **Li-2, Il-12, Tu-4, An-2, An-8, An-12, Il-76.**

State honours: Order of “Red Star”, Order “For Service to the Motherland of the third degree”, Soviet and Russian medals, Cuban medal “For the Defence of Cuito-Cuanavale”.

THE MEMOIRS

of Anatoly Eduardovich Alekseevsky,

Senior Lieutenant of the Reserve[\[52\]](#)

– I am Anatoly Eduardovich Alekseevsky, born in 1968. I finished the Minsk Suvorov cadet School. In 1992 I graduated from the Institute of Military Interpreters in Moscow.

I was conscripted in 1986, when I was a cadet doing an accelerated course of Portuguese at the Institute of Military Interpreters. I was given the rank of junior lieutenant and was sent, as was said then, on a utilization tour to Angola from 1986 to 1988.

From Luanda we were immediately sent to the 3rd military district in the south-east of the country. Geographically this is in the region of the towns of Cazombo, Luena, Lukusi and Saurimo and the Lungebunge River. Although the town of Saurimo is in the 10th military district, our mobile Command post was there.

– **What was your first day taking part in the war?**

– Now, to be honest, I can't establish which day was my first in the war. I served in the 3rd infantry brigade for a year and three months: from July 1986 until 1987. Then I went on leave and upon my return I arrived to the 143rd brigade in the same 3rd district. This was an air defence brigade, which provided anti-aircraft defence for Luena and the brigades operating there.

– **Was the 3rd infantry brigade a mechanized brigade?**

– The 3rd brigade was deemed to be an infantry brigade even though we had **T-55** tanks and **BTR-60PB APCs**.

At first, of course, because of my age I didn't perceive, like I realize now, what was happening there. At the time everything was assessed from the view of a 19 year old lad. So now, when you begin to recount everything, you give a different evaluation of yourself, your actions and the actions of others. In the end you understand that war really is a cruel thing because the things you saw there are things that you would never see and learn about in civil life.

Of course it was difficult. In what way? As for the language barrier, it was overcome by virtually all of interpreters within the first two months. No real difficulties arose with that.

Difficulties arose on the level of the way of life of the servicemen and the combat actions themselves. After ordinary civil life it is quite difficult for a person to pass into a state of war. Broadly speaking we were specially trained as interpreters and not to having to put on an assault rifle at the right moment, and stick up for yourself with assault rifle in hand. That is to shoot, kill somebody – we weren't trained for that.

– **Did you only take a minimal course of general military training?**

– You could say that. Of course we understood that we would have to do this, but we didn't fully realize that we would really have to come across this.

Now I'll try to briefly tell you about the impressions I got. We had to learn a lot there and then. Being in the brigade, next to our senior advisers and also interpreters who were already there, I adopted their experience. Straight away I was trying to study everything that was needed for survival in those conditions. This is a personal side of the issue. As for the operations in which we took part, we understood that war was really waged. From one side the governmental forces and on the other side – the so called opposition forces. Simpler – bandits. Everyone was given their own tasks but despite that there was some kind of belief that we are doing a needful deed. Among all the actions of the military advisers at the time I never heard questions like: 'Why are we here? Why are we fighting this war?' I reckon they taught like that: if you're ordered something you do it.

For example, when I was in the 3rd district I had to work not only in the brigades, but with the advisers of whole district as well because there was a lack of interpreters. Sometimes I would have to work in several brigades, go to the various meetings in the district, work directly with the district Commander and the chief military adviser in the district; sometimes I would have to work with in hospitals and in depots.

Correspondingly I encountered our people everywhere. Thus after some time I got the impression that an interpreter in Angola is a very necessary person. Especially in terms of supplies. An interpreter would effectively become the deputy for logistics. And during military action the survival capability of the military adviser depended directly on the quality of the translation and thus from how well the interpreter could carry out his duties.

For instance our duties included not only the first-hand interpretation of the Commands but establishing communications as well. We would have to open out the so called antenna of the **Rocal** radio transmitters that we had.

We had the **R-143** transmitter as well. We would encrypt the messages, decrypt them. Sometimes we would tune in to a wavelength and try to find UNITA's conversations.

There were all kinds of cases. A couple of times we would even have to decipher UNITA's radiograms, quite successfully I must say as the Angolans themselves (FAPLA) had samples of decoding.

– **They had UNITA's decipherment tables?**

– Yes, their intelligence worked.

– **And did UNITA successfully decipher our messages?**

– Naturally. Evidence of this was one incident, when we were in the region Kasamba if I'm not mistaken.

– **When was that?**

– Sometime in August 1987. You could date it more precisely using the radiogram notebook. As our 3rd brigade moved from one position to another I sent (using coded messages) a radiogram to the district about the location of the brigade. The district Command also sent coded messages concerning their coordinates so it was pretty much dubbing. Our military advisers, knowing that there are leakages of information always gave our coordinates with a certain allowance. That is they didn't give the precise coordinates but 5-7 km to the south, east or west.

And so in August 1987, when we were moving (a brigade is very vulnerable when its moving – there's only a side cordon, no dugout of anything) and there was a raid by the SAAF. The bombing was carried out at the very coordinates, which we sent. And this was literally 4 hours after we sent the radiogram.

– **What planes bombed you?**

– Mirage-2000s[\[53\]](#).

– **Not Cheetahs[\[54\]](#)?**

– We couldn't tell the type of the planes for definite, having not shot any down.

And afterwards when they flew away, we sent a query to the district: "Who received this information and using what channels? How was this information circulated anyway?" What happened was completely obvious: we gave the coordinates – four hours later the South Africans flew there and started bombing the empty area from low altitude. They were bombing precisely the area that we specified in the radiogram i.e. using false coordinates.

At the time we were located in a different place, 5-6 km away from the area that was bombed and as this was done the planes flew really quite low. As a result because of the low altitude and high speed they didn't notice us. We knew that there were leaks of information and we had an agreement with FAPLA, who also gave imprecise data when they dubbed our messages.

– **What other interesting moments were there?**

– You could say that all the operations were interesting moments because there were a lot of nuances there. For instance, the fact that the fighting spirit among the Angolans was, to be honest, virtually non-existent. Mainly these were guys, which were recruited from the plough-tail so to speak. There weren't really any that genuinely wanted to serve in the army.

– **Were there a lot of desertions?**

There wasn't any desertion as such. There was an interesting tendency: a man who tripped an anti-personnel mine or suffered some other fairly light injury was pleased that soon he would be sent back to the district and ultimately he wouldn't have to fight. That's the way things were.

People wanted to leave the brigade but in a lawful way. To run away was virtually impossible. And they knew that. You couldn't go into the forest as there you would probably meet UNITA forces and have to fight on their side. It's one or the other. Especially since the distances are quite substantial. When we left Lukusi, and we went to Kasamba or Kaniamba, the distance was 100-120 km. And covering 100-120 km on foot in the savannah is difficult.

In some places we went on roads, in others through the savanna. When we knew there weren't mines we used the roads. Where we weren't sure or we couldn't check the roads we went through the savannah.

– **The column consisted of tanks, BTRs and Engesas?**

– No, we mainly had **Urals** and **Unimogs** (Brazilian made).

– **Unimogs?**

– **Unimog** is a Brazilian version of the **Mercedes** truck. It's an open truck, in a way similar to the **IFA** East German truck. In addition to that we also had **IFAs** and **KrAZs**.

– **And the GAZ-66?**

– We didn't have that many of them.

– **And what about the UAZ minibuses (UAZ-452) and the UAZ all-terrain vehicles (UAZ-469)?**

– No, we didn't have any **UAZs**, we only had trucks.

Then we had **MTLBs**[\[55\]](#) – this is **Strela-10** on a **MTLB** base, **T-55** tanks and **BTR-60PB**. But the **BTRs** were only there for us, for the advisers. Also the Commander of the brigade had his own **BTR**.

– **And BRDM-2?**

– **BRDM-2s** weren't part of our brigade. And, accordingly, the fighters were on foot.

All in all, the brigade was heavy in terms of its weaponry because we had 82 mm mortars, four 120 mm mortars. That will suffice. For cover from enemy aircraft we had **Shilkas** (**ZU-23-4**) and **Zeushkas** (**ZU-23-2**). And at one point there was one **BM-21** rocket launcher. But when we had to say goodbye to it, we had to leave it a series of operations. We couldn't move them out.

– **Did you leave it without any missiles?**

– No, we did something more cunning. We activated the missile heads and blew it up.

– **Why didn't you have the chance to move them?**

– We had to disentangle, and there was a limit to the amount of hardware that we could take with us. The exit of tanks was a must, under any circumstances, as there was a limited amount of fuel (so had it ran out we would've lost the tanks). So we worked it out as follows: first the tanks go, then we move the **Strela-10s** out for defence against **Mirages**. The **BTRs** also left. So there were about five **Urals**, a couple of IFAs and a couple of **Unimogs**. This was all the hardware which we could fill up with fuel. And we were moving out on it, having loaded the ammunition, provisions and everything necessary on it. And as a whole the brigade had to walk.

– **How did you get encircled?**

– Strictly speaking we went to the area we were specified. This was around May 1987, if not earlier. The brigade stopped in defensive positions, 100-120 km south of the Ungebungo River. It appears that the district Command had planned that we would draw some of the UNITA battalions towards us. The same role was played by the 39th brigade who were to the east of us, at about the same distance from Lukusi. But we were much more powerfully armed which is why in the end we managed to escape from the encirclement by ourselves.

The combat actions took place as follows: they didn't attempt to openly attack us, mainly used ambushes and missile artillery. They had **Valkiris** – a copy of the **BM-21**.

They frequently fired on us using the **Valkiris**, and from certain channels were got the message that we were fired upon by South Africans from UNITA's positions.

– **And the BM-21s?**

– No, UNITA didn't fire on us using **BM-21**. Although... it did happen once. The thing was that when were sitting in the encirclement, one column, which had a **BM-21**, was coming to help us. Evidently they, having captured the column, and consequently, the **BM-21** and part of the ammunition for it made one salvo at us. And when the ammunition finished they must've left it.

Our brigade spent some time in the defence of Kasamba., where we were stationed without receiving foodstuffs, ammunition or fuel. Fuel and food was coming to an end, cases of jaundice began. There were three attempts to send us **Mi-8** helicopters. Twice they had to turn back because they were fired upon and the third time it was shot down. The pilots were Angolans. Not our guys or Cubans; that's why they didn't reach us.

In the end we came to the point where we had to break out by ourselves. The decision was made by the highest Angolan Command.

We gathered the remains of fuel, foodstuffs, ammunition and loaded it into the transport that we decided to take with us. And we left the remaining equipment but in such a way that it could not be used. We simply took sledge hammers, pickaxes, shovels and used them to break up the motors, engine crankcases, carburettors. After that the trucks could not be repaired. Of course we cut up the tyres. After that the vehicles could only be repaired by FAPLA in the workshops.

We had quite a large stock of ammunition but still we had to destroy it. Mainly these were rounds for tanks, **BTRs**, **BM-21s**, cartridges. We exploded all of this by activating the **BM-21** missiles. They began to explode, which denoted the rest of it.

Then we retreated by 100 km, to Lukusi where our mobile Command post was located. There the brigade received reinforcement, supplies, freshened itself up.

The passage to Lukusi took about a week. We didn't move particularly quickly. Checked whether there were any minefields and the rest of it.

In fact we suffered most on the way back. There were attacks by the UNITA battalion, which controlled our retreat. They saw, that there wasn't much equipment and everything else left and understood that the brigade is escaping from an encirclement. They attacked not only at night but even in daytime. And there were a couple of rather heavy engagements, to the point that our flank guard was swept away. UNITA troops almost reached the line where our flank guards had been, we ourselves were forced to fire back using assault rifles. And naturally there weren't any trenches as the brigade was on the move.

– **Did UNITA take their bodies with them afterwards?**

– No. The bodies from their side remained on the ground because on our side the tanks entered the battle. First the tanks didn't open fire because they were Commanded by the brigade Commander and he didn't give such an order. But our military adviser made the decision that it was time to use the tanks and open direct fire from the cannons and machine guns.

The distance was just a few hundred metres. From this range UNITA men fired using small arms.

– **At what distance did combat take place?**

– Around 500m, perhaps even 400m in places.

– **Were snipers used?**

– Firstly we didn't have any **SVD** sniper rifles and secondly we didn't have any snipers in our brigade. And as for UNITA judging by our losses I'd say we didn't understand whether they had any snipers or not. Mainly in our brigade we had casualties from mortar fire, **G-3** assault rifles and our own **Kalashnikovs** which UNITA used.

In the end we managed to fend off these attacks and made it to Lukusi. This was in August 1987. And at that time we receive instructions for the district Command that we must go to the south-east to pull out the encircled 39th brigade, which had the task – to distract UNITA.

As I understood that the leadership didn't plan to carry out offensive operations in this region. We were simply making a decoy manoeuvre.

We were sent out quite a large distance, around 100 km, away from the mobile Command post and drew on ourselves (both the brigades together) 10-12 UNITA battalions. I worked out to be 4-6 battalions of the enemy for each brigade. Each UNITA battalion consisted of 400-600 troops. Our brigade was quite large – around 1200-1500 people. But when we left the encirclement there were only about 800 left. (One could check this more precisely in the radiogram notebook).

It was at this time that the FAPLA offensive in the region o Cuito-Cuanavale was being prepared. We carried out our decoy manoeuvre in advance and thus UNITA received a warning that an offensive could be developed here. We simply drove a wedge in a region which they controlled and drew onto ourselves and thus contained 10-12 enemy battalions, preventing them from moving these troops to Cuito-Cuanavale.

When we went to free the 39th brigade from the encirclement, on the road there there were about four clashes with UNITA. They did, however, quite quickly organize themselves and moved in a considerable amount of equipment and men so a couple of these clashes were very venomous.

– **What hardware did they use?**

– They brought along the **BM-21** and **Valkiri** missile artillery. In addition to that quite frequent of the SAAF **Mirages** took place. But in this region we now had the opportunity of calling up the Cubans. I mean their **MiG-21s**. There weren't any **MiG-23s** in our district.

The Cuban **MiG-21s** operated successfully, the South African **Mirages** ran away from them all the time. We called on the Cuban fighter planes a couple of times and by the things they did in the air it was clear that these were the Cubans. They performed such amazing things in the air. Once when the Cubans encountered the **Mirages**, they almost entered aerial combat but the South Africans simply left, ran away. They see from the **MiGs'** flight pattern that these weren't Angolans. The Cubans didn't insist on aerial combat and safely returned to base. But the fact that they could cover us from the air, besides our ability to shoot at the **Mirages** from the ground, really helped us.

By the way we made a couple of successful shots from the **Strela-10**. We shot one South African plane down and damaged another one, but it managed to fly away. You could see that it had been hit because of the trail of black smoke that it left behind.

When we approached the 39th brigade, they were in quite a sorrowful state, they were completely encircled. We broke through this circle, came up to them, brought them fuel.

The fuel was transported mainly using **Urals** and **IFAs**. The **Unimogs** transported the foodstuffs because these were less powerful vehicles. The barrels of petrol and cases of ammo were in the **Urals** and **KrAZs**. And as for **KAMAZs**, we didn't have any.

The **Urals** were equipped with (diesel) **KAMAZ** engines (**Ural 4320**) but there some **Urals** with their own (petrol) engines (**Ural 375**).

After we arrived to the 39th brigade's position, we positioned ourselves in defensive formations at the same location; we reorganized ourselves and formed a united Command. Consequently our brigade Commander became the Commander of the two brigades. We assumed a formation and started to fight our way back.

As we were leaving they tried to attack us again but it didn't work because we had regrouped and became a powerful force and fired in return without worrying about ammunition. Both tanks (100 mm guns) and **BTRs** (**KPVT** 14.5 mm machine guns) fired on UNITA. On the whole everything worked. We didn't count the amount of cartridges and shells we had because we knew we were retreating and were sure that there would be enough for the entire return trip.

We successfully forced back about three UNITA battalions in front of us, there were about four battalions on our side and about five of the enemy.

Later, near to Lukusi, with about 40 km left, UNITA undertook one last attack, but I think there were only two UNITA battalions. It wasn't a meaningful engagement, just a skirmish.

When we and 39th brigade arrived at Lukusi and our replacement came, I went for my first leave.

We flew home on a **Tu-154** via Sofia. Refuelling took place there and then it was straight to Moscow.

After my leave I was sent the 143rd air defence brigade. I worked there for around four months.

– **What did the air defence consist of?**

– We had the so called AA cannons, **Shilkas**, **BTLB (Strela-10)** – four of them, which covered the entire brigades position, and a **KMTLB** (Command tracking station), on the base of a **GAZ-66** truck, with a cabin and a large-scale radar. Although each **MTLB** (tracking station) had its own radar there was a central one on the **KMTLB** and all of them formed a single network. The central radar was more powerful and the control took place through it. Also the brigade was partially staffed with infantry.

The task of the 143rd brigade was to protect the air space. It was located in Luena itself during my time there. Then, after I left, it was transferred to the south of the district and provided cover for the brigades operating there.

After my time in the 143rd brigade I was sent to the centre training infantry sergeants in Huambo. I served there for four months. Then I again returned to the 3rd district, but now in the role of an interpreter for the Command of the 3rd military district. There were three interpreters with the district Command: the senior interpreter, a captain, and two lieutenants. I already received the rank of lieutenant then.

We had experience and so worked not on brigade level but on district level. While I worked in the district I managed to make one flight on an **AN-26** to Kazombo, one of the eastern most towns in Angola. Stationed there was, I can't remember for certain, I think the 45th brigade. We organized its defences, tuned up the anti-aircraft defence systems and its military dispositions in general. We helped to correctly organise the defensive dispositions of the advisee side.

I worked in the 3rd district till my end of stay in Angola. There were different kinds of missions: to Saurimo, Luanda. Went around with various military advisers on various matters, colonels and lieutenant-colonels, who were pretty much Commanders for the Angolans. For example, with the heads of GSM (fuel and lubrication materials) branch, supplies branch, medical branch. Meeting after meeting. There were meetings almost every day, depending on the situation in our district, the other districts, the front as a whole.

– **Do you have any notes left?**

– There's one note. About the events when we were moving to Kasamba, the first time, before we got encircled. When we were going there I tried to keep a diary, but it ended up being quite small.

– **Did UNITA mainly move in trucks capture from our side?**

– No, I wouldn't say so. Our guys, who repaired the hardware, specialists in the armoured and automotive equipment, said that judging by the sound (in the areas we were you could hear the engine sounds from 5-6 km away as there weren't any other noises) UNITA used their own hardware, the engine noise was different to that made by our vehicles.

When there were bombardments using missile projectiles we judged that these were either the South Africans themselves or UNITA using South African hardware.

First they would range in using mortars. They would only fire 3-4 shells using mortars. And then the **Valkiri** rocket launcher would begin to fire. They sent out the whole round, we counted the explosions. Sometimes they would fire 3-4 times using the round.

– **Did they use 60 mm or 82 mm mortars?**

– Mainly using the 82 mm. They didn't come closer than 5-6 km to the brigade so the 60 mm simply wouldn't have reached us. They were scared of coming closer and fired from afar.

– **And what did you use to fire back? Tanks?**

– We could but we used ammunition sparingly and tried not to feature unnecessarily especially since we would have to carry out area fire. That's one.

And secondly we didn't fire much in reply to be honest. We didn't consider it to be necessary simply because these were not organized units firing on us but small groups. That is a group, which was given our coordinates, would drive up and its task was to fire on us several times and leave.

We didn't have an aim to oppose them or come into direct contact with them. The only thing we would do was to frequently send out surveillance patrols. These were reconnaissance groups 10-15 strong.

– **What were FAPLA reconnaissance groups armed with?**

– Assault rifles, a machine gun, sometimes mortars and always grenade launchers. There was always one grenade launcher operator in the group. But there weren't always mortar operators. We used the light, portable version of the 60 mm mortars, earlier captured from UNITA. We had ammunition for it so we used it.

– **Were UNITA soldiers armed with our (Soviet-designed) weapons?**

– In general, yes. **AK-47s**, machine guns, Chinese-made ones among them. But there were also specimens of American weapons. **G-3** – a Swiss rifle (for the 7.62 mm NATO machine gun cartridge). I think they had these Swiss-made rifles.

– **So the European countries would dump old unwanted weapons to UNITA?**

– Yes.

– **And FN FAL rifles, which is also the R1 rifle of the same calibre, did you meet any of those?**

– There was that as well.

– **Were there western machine-guns as well or was it only small arms?**

– No, only small arms.

– **Did you encounter any 7.92 mm Mauser rifles?**

– No, but we ourselves used the **Mauzer** pistols. I had such an automatic pistol. However I am not sure about the rifles. After fire fight various types of captured guns were brought and I can't remember which ones, to be honest. But once we encountered a **PPSH-41** light machine gun.

On UNITA's side there both Chinese and Yugoslav made weapons like the **AK-47**.

– **Do you remember anything funny?**

– There was one incident on Ungebunge River. Knowing that there were crocodiles we went to shoot one down.

– **Is it difficult to shoot it?**

– I don't know. But the Angolans themselves say that it's possible – in the side, belly or eyes. Some thing of that sort. But supposedly you can't shoot it from an **AK-47** normally. But I was hoping that using our sub-machine gun [\[56\]](#) I would be able to pierce its armour.

We went to the river. Its width there was about 15-20m, not very wide. I see that on the other side in the tree shades there's something which looked like a crocodile. So I send burst of fire. It falls into the water, floats up. I was even quite proud that I had managed to hit and kill it. Its body was drifting downstream. Naturally, I didn't go to the river alone but with Angolans. And I sent them to retrieve the crocodile's body.

– **Were the Angolans scared of the crocodile?**

– They were a bit, but they could see that it turned belly side up. So they weren't particularly scared. They brought it to me and it turned that it was not a crocodile but a monitor lizard.

– **Is it edible?**

– Listen further, this is interesting. I am thinking: "What to do with it? Throw away? I don't need a monitor lizard." I ask the Angolans: "What can you do with it?" "You can eat it." I say: "You're going to eat it?" "Nah" "Well, take to it to the brigade Commander then, I'm sure he'll like such a present."

The next day I meet the brigade Commander and ask: "So was it tasty?" "What was tasty?" I say: "What do you mean? The meat of course!" He: "What meat?" "I sent you a monitor lizard yesterday" "Who did you send it with? When?"

It turned out they didn't bring it to him, ate it themselves. Don't how they ate it, fried it or what, but it's quite amusing. Later the brigade Commander told me: "Next time you shoot anything that moves bring it straight to me!"

He showed me how to eat grasshoppers, caterpillars the size of a hand. All of this is fried in oil on a pan. It's pure protein.

I'm not saying that I felt sick or anything but I didn't feel great. Should I just say it was a bit unpleasant. I declined to eat them. Such a mishap.

And another curious incident: once in Luena we went to get water as there was no running water in the town. We filled up water into barrels and took it to the brigade. And the rivers there are fairly clean as there are no factories, chemical and other waste.

We used the usual 200 litre barrels. They not only used for water but also for diesel and aviation fuel.

We went to collect water and of course we used the opportunity to wash ourselves and clothes as well. We left in the evening, around 5 pm. We got ready to drive back around 7-8 pm. In that period nightfall is fairly early and at 9 pm it was already dark. I went in a **BTR-60PB** and one **Ural 4320** fully loaded with barrels of water, some guards and 12 Angolans how wanted to have a wash came as well.

On the **BTR** there were four more people from our mission and behind the wheel was an Angolan, a proven, good driver. But when he was changing the water in the radiator he forgot to put water in one of the engines (the **BTR-60PB** has two engines, one for each side).

There a large climb from the river, about 3 km long. The vehicle had to go up quite a steep slope. Around the middle of this climb one the engines starts to boil and the other engine is heating up quickly. I see that the **BTR** is going to get stuck. One side switches off – the engine has burned out, and we were just about moving on one engine and you could feel that it was about to blow out as well. I shout to the driver: “Stop, stop the vehicle!” But what to do? Nightfall was approaching. There are only four of us, it’s 12 km to the town, and you could run into a UNITA reconnaissance group, into anything! We had left the area controlled by the town’s security forces. But I know that behind us is another vehicle, the **Ural** truck. So, I think, I must take the situation into my own hands. Only the **Ural** can help us – it’ll pull us out on low gear. It’ll switch into second gear and with the help of the second **BTR** engine it’ll pull us out even though it’s loaded up. In principle the **Ural** is very powerful.

It was growing dark. I see them driving towards us. I sat down on the **BTR**’s turret, put a sub-machine gun (**AK-47**) on my knees just in case. My driver shouts to the **Ural**: “Stop!” But the **Ural** wasn’t really subordinate to us; there were people from different brigades there. And there were about 20 barrels in the open body of the truck.

And so the **Ural** is climbing up the hill, we’re waving to it to stop, but they’re not stopping. I see that the **Ural** is almost level with our **BTR** but they are not slowing down. I work the bolt and send a burst of fire into the air. I didn’t have any choice otherwise they would’ve just driven past.

– **Did you fire the whole clip?**

– No, probably around ten cartridges, in three short bursts. After I sent the burst in the air I pointed the sub-machine gun at the driver of the truck. Naturally, they stopped. But he braked so suddenly that a number of people and barrels flew out of the vehicle. I’ll remember the way they flew with the barrels for the rest of my life.

– **Did anyone get hurt?**

– One Angolan broke his arm after one of the barrels fell on it. But I didn’t have any choice. We didn’t have a radio transmitter in the **BTR** so we couldn’t send a message to the district Command.

When they stopped my driver flew into the **Ural** cabin pulls out their driver, throws him onto the road. I am also running there, shouting: “Everyone out of the vehicle!” Everyone who didn’t fall out under braking got out. I ask: “Is there a tow rope in the **BTR**?” There was, so we attached the **BTR** to the truck. I was driving the **BTR** and my driver the **Ural**. But first we had to load back

the barrels of water. It is needed in the town, so there's no other way out. The Angolans had to walk. I decided that we had to lessen the workload for the **Ural** and **BTR**, but it was still risky. The **Ural** is powerful but to pull a **BTR** uphill...

We drove up to the top of the hill, waited for the rest, sat down and drove away in the same manner. I thought that I am not going to detach the **Ural** because the engine on the **BTR** could've still burned out otherwise.

We were approaching Luena, it was already dark. And then I see there's a column moving towards us. There's still 5 km to the town and I can't make out whether these are our guys or not. They are driving without lights. And of course we are as well. I ordered not to turn on the lights in order not to draw attention to ourselves. And then when we were very close we found out from the roll-call that they were our guys. It turned that in the column there was our chief district adviser and my superior as well – they were coming to succour us. They already realized that something must've happened. Their column consisted of three **BTRs** and one **Ural**.

I was happy at the fact that they to succour us. Although the first thing that the chief military adviser did was to come up to me and hit me saying: "Why did you go? Why did you take the **BTR**? An **Ural** would've been enough!" But despite that it was a useful learning experience.

There were a lot of other interesting moments as well. For example, when I was supposed to fly from Kazumbo to Luena. Again we got stuck in Kazumbo for longer than had been planned and the air defence adviser and I had to go to give our conspectuses on Marxist-Leninist philosophy^[57]. But our conspectuses weren't ready and consequently we couldn't report to our district Commander. And we found a thousand different reasons due to which we couldn't leave Kazumbo. Bu the actual reason was very trivial. We had two 40 litre canisters of home-made beer and it needed to be distilled into home-made hooch. But as it turned out the incident wasn't funny at all.

– **In what way?**

– We had a home distilling device. Our Russian folk can make them by expedient means. Then you just need to wait for the necessary time and the home-brew is ready.

Literally an hour the plane (**An-26**) on which we were supposed to fly left we receive a radiogram that is has been shot down. You could say that the desire to distil the home-brew and the reluctance to give conspectuses saved our lives!

The crew of the plane was Angolan. The only thing that was really sad was that on board was a Cuban adviser who flew to Kazumbo with us. Everyone on board died.

We sent out a reconnaissance group from Kazumbo. They found the wreckage and brought form the crash site an arm with the epaulette of the Cuban adviser.

– **Was the Cuban a white man or not?**

– He was a mulatto.

After that a query about us came from the district Command: "Were there any Soviets on board?" And we radio: "There were. They were flying to give their conspectuses." This really meant: "We could've been because of you and we would've no longer existed on this earth."

When we finally arrived in Luena half the mission turned up to meet us. Especially our women touched me: “Tolik, you’re alive!” I almost started crying. We survived because of such a stupid thing.

– **And how long did you drink the home-brewed gin for?**

– We drank it in Kazumbo for about two weeks, and when we brought to the district– they drank it there for about another month.

– **How strong was it?**

– Well, the *pervatch*[\[58\]](#) was about 70% as usual. We made it using condensed milk.

– **Did you dilute it?**

– No. Everything was as it is supposed to be: a normal content. The people didn’t have any proper alcohol there, especially since in Angola vodka brought from Russia was a rarity. So our home-brew was considered to be a chic present.

Others made using rice, but we had lots of concentrated milk from FAPLA. It was in three-litre cans, Portuguese and French-made. It was very weak and watery compared to the Russian one.

– **And any honours?**

– Once I was nominated for the order of the “Red Star” and thrice “For Combat Services” medal. But the nominations didn’t get through Luanda, through General Gusev. Junior Lieutenant Alekseevsky turned out not to be worthy of any honours.

In addition I can say that I am from Belarus from Molodechi, a small town near Minsk. It’s where the singer and musician Yuri Antonov studied. By the way, academically he was a total underachiever.

– **I am not sure that in a hundred years time people will remember Yuri Antonov?**

– Well, despite that he is quite famous now. People listen to him, class him as a maestro of the domestic stage.

– **What did you do after returning from Angola?**

– Graduated from the Military Institute of Foreign Languages in 1992 and then quit the armed forces. Currently I am working for a private firm in Moscow.

– **Where do you live?**

– I am a permanent resident in Belarus.

– **Your military rank?**

– Senior lieutenant of the reserve.

APPENDIX I

Information from the guest page of the Russian Association of the Angolan War Veterans webpage

The chairman of the Council of the Regional public organization of the participants in the rendering of International help to the Republic of Angola – “The Union of Angolan War Veterans”, Colonel of the reserve Vadim Andreevich Sagachko writes [05.04.2007]:

... the six Cuban **T-55** tanks, which I saw on the battlefield near Cuito-Cuanavale were hit by shaped charge projectiles and burned down together with the crews. And although the Cubans later recovered the remains of their tankmen, among the burnt cartridges we found human bone fragments. Tanks were stationed in defence, in trenches and the ammunition[59] was completely used. The guys fought to the bitter end and it appears that they put the enemy out of their temper so much that they worked out the temper by shooting at point-blank at the already burned out tanks using grenade launchers – this is as in the turrets in some the tanks there were another 5-6 grenade launcher holes.

Two destroyed Angolan **T-54Bs** stood nearby in a mine field so we couldn't inspect it in detail. One of them had a burned out motor section and on the other the front right rollers were destroyed...

[1] Recorded by Gennady Shubin on 11 April 2005.

[2] Courses of the sergeant school for privates.

[3] Marshal Georgy Zhukov wanted to open a school for training of reconnaissance officers in the town of Belaya Tzerkov (White Church in English). There were interviews held with several of us (I was at regiment school at the time). It was planned to train strategic reconnaissance personnel: three foreign languages, higher education and training in a civil profession – for action in the interior of the enemy. But in 1957 Georgy Zhukov lost his post, the whole plan was abandoned and I went to the Paratroop Command College (*note by Miiyaev*).

[4] City located 190 km south-east from Moscow .

[5] This relates to the fact most of the commanding generals in the VDV, that is the Russian air-born troops, including the current head of the VDV Lieutenant-General Valery Evtukhovich all served in reconnaissance.

[6] A Russian proverb.

[7] **BMD** stands for “airborne combat vehicle” in Russian.

[8] An airborne self-propelled artillery mount with a 57mm gun – a light self-propelled gun.

[9] Four-barrelled 14.5mm (14.5X114) anti-aircraft machine gun based on the Vladimirov heavy machine gun (**KPVT**)

[10] Double-barrelled 23mm quick-firing anti-aircraft gun (known as **Zeushka**).

[11] 2 tonne petrol cross-country truck.

[12] This is described in detail in the memoirs by retired Colonel A.V. Kukushkin, where he writes: «During the planning of the operation and the preparation of troops for the entry into DRA (Democratic Republic of Afghanistan) there were both rises and falls. The reason for this was the doubts among the top echelons of power on making a decision concerning the entry of troops and interference into Afghanistan’s affairs. The General Staff did not really have faith in these ideas. Otherwise how can you explain the disbandment in August-September 1979 of the paratroop division stationed in Fergana (Uzbekistan), which for many years prepared for possibly action in the southern direction and could be in Afghanistan in a matter of hours. From what once was a complete, well trained division only one regiment was left. And when the entry of airborne forces into Afghanistan became evident, one had to send a division, which was located in the European part of the Soviet Union, several thousand kilometers away from the border with DRA. It is now known that despite objections from the General Staff the final decision to enter into Afghanistan was taken at the meeting of the Politburo of the CC of CPSU in Moscow on 12th of December 1979. (A.V. Kukushkin. Pryzhok desantnikov v Afganistan). (A.V. Kukushkin The Jump of the Paratroopers into Afghanistan), 2004, p. 12.)

[13] **BTR** stands for **APC** in Russian

[14] The Soviet Union’s part in the Second World War during 1941-1945 is called the Great Patriotic War. The USSR destroyed 74% of war planes and more than 75% of ground forces of Nazi Germany and its satellites (*note by editor*).

[15] Despite its relatively small calibre this is a powerful weapon. During the Arab-Israeli war in 1973 **BMD-1** shells pierced the turrets of the Israeli **Centurion** tanks, which led to the death of the crew although externally the tank seemed undamaged (*note by editor*).

[16] Anti-tank guided missile launchers – in Russian – **PTURS**.

[17] In area of the royal palace there were warehouses with Soviet model small arms – **PM** and **Stechkin** pistols, **AK-47** assault rifles, **Kalashnikov (PK)** machine guns – 2 machine guns in a crate (more than 20 crates), a large amount of ammunitions. Similar depots were located in the areas of the General Staff, the 2nd army corps, 20th airborne regiment and the 47th rifle regiment. Until we took these depots no one had been guarding them (*note by Mityaev*).

[18] At 1900 hours, after an earlier arrangement with Yakub, the commander of the 103rd guards airborne division Major-General Ivan Fyodorovich Ryabchenko and three accompanying officers arrived at the General Staff office of the DRA. Under the guise of the chief of staff of the division was a colonel from the KGB (I can’t remember the name) and also two paratroopers – the Lagovsky brothers. The older, Stanislav – in the role of head of the political section and the younger, Pavel, carried out the duties of the commander’s aide. Both the brothers – valiant soldiers and excellent athletes. Ryabchenko’s group was vested with an exceptionally important

and dangerous task. Under the pretence of clarification of the arrangement concerning the redeployment of the forces of the division to their places of stay they had to meet Yakub and disperse his suspicions towards the paratroopers, which arose because their movements within the city which had commenced. And when a signal of the beginning of the operation was given they would have to neutralise him and take him out of the game as a key figure for the organisation of some sort of resistance. This task was audacious and very dangerous as the slightest delay by the forces of the 103rd VDV division at the beginning of the assault on the General Staff office would put the group on the verge of elimination. But the aim of taking the “second figure” after Amin out of the game was worth the risk. (A.V. Kukushkin., The Jump of the Paratroopers into Afghanistan, 2004, pp. 24-25).

[19] Single-use **RPG “Muha” (RPG-18)** is expanded and then put into cocked position immediately before battle. After the **RPG** is expanded it cannot be folded back, you can only fire and throw it away (*note by Mityaev*).

[20] Various gun armaments dating back to the wars against Britain were stored in the old castle of the Puli Charhi prison. These were the likes of arquebuses, mortars, small calibre guns (37mm) (*note by Mityaev*).

[21] The operation began at 1930 with a signal “Storm-33” which was sent on the radio transmitters and a large explosion in the central telegraph office, which destroyed all the cable lines including international ones, leaving Kabul without telecommunications.

The main crisis areas were: Amin’s residency (palace), the complex of buildings of the Ministry of Defence and of the General Staff, Kabul’s radio and television buildings, in the city centre – the army corps, the prison in Puli Charhi and in Bagram the disarmament of the anti-aircraft defence and the aviation garrison.

The assault on the palace began 15 minutes before the overall signal. The preparation of the KGB groups and Halbaev’s special unit, it seems, did not go unnoticed with Amin’s guards. The special forces men noticed that in the tank battalion ammunition was being given and preparation for battle had started. In order to outstart the palace guards a decision was taken to begin the assault before the overall signal. The first to lunge to the palace were the special KGB units, two companies from Halbaev’s battalion and combat vehicles with paratroopers of the 9th company. The crews of the vehicles were in reality commanded by KGB officers; their attack was covered by the fire of **Shilkas** and **AGS-17s**. Part of the forces blocked the tank battalion and guards’ barracks.

At first hand the palace guards took the column of **BMDs** and **BTRs** to be a mutinous Afghan unit and opened drenching fire on them, including using high-calibre machine guns. The head vehicle was immobilized and blocked the narrow road. The attackers carried on the assault on foot. It must be noted that, having anticipated combat in the dark all the members of this unit had distinguishing white armbands and white stripes on the headgear, in order not to confuse our guys with Amin’s guards. Under fire cover from combat vehicles and **Shilkas**, overcoming drenching fire by the enemy, moving by bounds the attackers approached and burst inside. The action inside the palace took place in darkness, shots were fired at random towards sounds of gunfire. Before bursting into rooms one would throw 1-2 grenades, follow them up with a submachine gun burst and only then burst inside.

As the participants say, in the first few minutes of armed engagement it was very difficult. The guards were strong, well-trained and exceed our forces almost fourfold. But the attackers were

helped by formidable vigor, courage and belief in victory. Out of the special KGB units almost everyone was wounded.

Amin's body was later found after the battle on the first floor of the palace. The eyewitnesses said that he was half-naked, in Addidas boxers and vest.

The mad and erratic fire during the assault on the palace caused the deaths of some unarmed outsiders. Among them was a doctor of a Soviet hospital Colonel V. Kuznechenkov who prior to the fighting was giving aid to Amin and his guests from poisoning.

Now it has become known that the operation of Amin's elimination began during the day. Amin's chef, one Mulajan (an ethnic Uzbek) added poison to food, poisoning Amin and his guests. To save the dictator a doctor, colonel V. Kuznechenkov, was urgently called and he pulled him out of death's clutches.

During the action Amin's sons were killed and the younger daughters were lightly wounded. After the action they were sent to the medical battalion and their subsequent fate is unknown to me.

The assault and battle for the palace lasted about 40-45 minutes, its results were received by Lieutenant-General B.S. Ivanov in the command post in an open message on the KGB radio transmitter: "Amin kaput!"

The losses during the assault were substantial. 15 men were killed: 5 KGB officers, among them Colonel G.I. Boyarinov, 4 paratroopers and 6 of Halbaev's special forces. Around 80 people received wounds of various severity levels. Colonel G.I. Boyarinov fought in body armour but by a fatal contingency two bullets hit the unprotected places and fatally wounded him. (A. V. *Kukushkin*, *The Jump of the Paratroopers into Afghanistan*, 2004, pp. 26-28.)

[22] **UAZ-469** all-terrain vehicle (jeep).

[23] Soviet built block of prefabricated houses (*note by editor*).

[24] Tsarandoi is the Afghan police (*note by Mityaev*).

[25] **BRDM-2** (**BRDM** stands for combat reconnaissance patrol vehicle in Russian, Armoured Reconnaissance Vehicle in other words) – a very good vehicle. It floats excellently, and it's very convenient to use for fishing. When I served in Belarus, if I had spare time I would drive to the lakes on a **BRDM** and would fish off it. You can lie down like on a deck of a ship. That's why hunters and fishermen like to buy them (disused **BRDMs**).

I like to put up fishing nets using them. You put the net on the deck and then you put it in the water as you move along the reeds. Great fishing! Although the engine on the **BRDM-1** was a bit weak – 90 bhp, whereas on the **BRDM-2** it was quite a bit more powerful (*note by Mityaev*).

[26] I visited Afghanistan once more in August 1980 for two weeks, when the military action was beginning to take place. I trained my units for activity in the mountains. Before we carried out our operations combat exercises usually took place, and the soldiers used the phrase "dry yourself up". At first they sweated awfully. And it was not only in the physical sense that it was very difficult to operate in the mountains. In order for the body to get used to action in the highlands we would first spend a week training in Shindand in the north-west of Afghanistan. A group of officers was created from the General Staff of the VDV for combat training of the units.

I was included in this as the reconnaissance specialist. Heading this group was a Colonel-General, Deputy Commander-in-Chief of Ground Forces for combat training, can't remember his name though. We concerned ourselves with orienteering and mountainous combat tactics. Then we flew to Kandahar. There we carried on similar training. The 70th infantry brigade was stationed there (*note by Mityaev*).

[27] **BMP** stands for Infantry Combat Vehicle in Russian.

[28] We presumed that with the end of the operation regarding the abolition of Amin's regime, the adoption of a more democratic rule and a some sort of stabilisation of the situation in the country, our mission in the DRA would end and in the immediate future we would receive the order to return to the Soviet Union. And of course the first people to leave would be us, the paratroopers. At first this hope was not even discarded by Marshal N.V. Ogarkov, who foresaw an exit of the troops. We gave the order to the staff office of the 103rd guard division to calculate and plan a timetable for march of the units of the division from Kabul to Termez.

But the General Staff office was stubbornly quiet. In the beginning of January the First Deputy Minister of Defence Marshal Sergei Leonidovich Sokolov arrived into Kabul and in an instance dispersed our hopes. He passed on to us that all the troops including the paratroopers would stay for an undefined period of time. This is the decision of the Politburo and the Government.

This was the second disastrous mistake by the political leadership of the country, if you count the entry of troops as the first.

It was evident that under this development our troops would inevitably have to enter into action against the insurgents that is a guerrilla war, a lengthy and exhausting conflict, which would add neither valour nor military glory. We thought that it was particularly meaningless to leave the paratroopers in the DRA. But top military command and the General Staff had their own arguments.

S.L. Sokolov, who was appointed the accountable for the military action of our troops in the DRA, naturally, didn't want his most prestigious, best trained units to leave.

And so the presence of the paratroopers in Afghanistan, which we naively thought would be episodic, would stretch for nearly 10 years.

And one other thing. Not infrequently on the television and in the press there are Afghan veterans, among them those from the special units of the KGB, the immediate participants of these events. From these stories the viewer and the reader can tell, that only these courageous guys could abolish Amin's odious regime and bring new forces to power in the DRA. Without putting in question the undoubted courage and heroism of these people, without lessening what they had achieved, I must draw attention to one important, if not principal factor in these events. The capture of Amin's palace is one of the main episodes, but only episodes, of the action in Kabul. Behind the backs of these brave men around 8 thousand paratroopers were waging battle at tens of other crucial installations in the city, tying down and neutralizing the troops many thousand strong (up to 20 thousand), loyal to Amin. This must be known and kept in mind. (*A.V. Kukushkin, The Jump of the Paratroopers Into Afghanistan, 2004, pp. 60-62.*)

[29] In 1986-1989 (*note by editor*).

[30] **Valkiri Mk 1** is a slightly modified copy of the Soviet **BM-21**, but with a larger calibre (127 mm compared to 122mm on the **BM-21**) (*note by editor*).

[31] Lieutenant-General Vasiliy Shahnovich was the chief military adviser in Angola in 1977-1980. After his return from Angola he served as the deputy head of the Higher Officers Courses “Vystrel” near Moscow. Died in 1984 (*note by editor*).

[32] Colonel-General Konstantin Kurochkin, former First Deputy Commander of the VDV, was the chief military adviser in Angola in 1982-1985 (*note by editor*).

[33] After serving in Angola, he no longer served in the VDV but in the ground forces in the Leningrad military district. The former commander of the 103rd Guard airborne division, hero of the war in Afghanistan, veteran of the war in Angola, the chairman of the city’s veterans’ association, retired Lieutenant-General Ivan Fyodorovich Ryabchenko died in St. Petersburg in August 1997 (*note by editor*).

[34] The first head of a group of 40 Soviet military specialists and translators in Angola (starting in November 1975) was Colonel V.G. Trofimenko. And the first Military Adviser was Major-General I. Ponomarenko, who replaced Trofimenko (with his arrival the Soviet mission increased from 200 to 344 people). Lieutenant-General V.V. Shahnovich commanded the Soviet military advisers and specialists from 1977 to 1980. By this time their number had increased to over 500. Lieutenant-General G.S. Petrovsky headed the mission in 1980-1982 and Colonel-General K.Y. Kurochkin during 1982-1985. By this time the size of the mission had risen to over 2000 people and remained at that level until 1988. Lieutenant-General L. Kuzmenko was the Chief Military Adviser during 1985-1987 and Lieutenant-General P.I. Gusev during 1987-1990. In April-November 1990 this post was held by Major-General S. Surodeev and from November 1990 until 1992 by Lieutenant-General V.N. Belyaev. Under him there were several dozen people. From 1992 his position was renamed as Chief Military Consultant of the Ministry of Defence of Angola. General V. Lebedev replaced him and occupied the post during 1992-1994.

In total there were 107 Soviet generals and admirals, 7211 officers, more than 12 000 servicemen, and if you include the sailors, pilots of the military-transport aviation, aeromechanics, marines, then it will be no less than 30 000 servicemen and 1000 civil specialists. (*Colonel*) *Sergey Kolomnin*, *Russkiy Spetsnaz v Afrike*. (*Sergey Kolomnin*, *Russian Special Forces in Africa*, 2005, pp. 73-74, 99, 220-221.)

[35] Cadre (reduced strength) division is a unit which is up to establishment (or close to) in terms of the number of officers, the hardware and armaments but with less than quarter of the junior enlisted. If mobilisation is announced the division increases to its full size (*note by editor*).

[36] In the Angolan province of Cunene there was a network of early warning radar stations, which tracked SAAF. In foreign military literature they mistakenly called “Soviet stations for satellite tracking of the NATO ships in the South Atlantic” (*note by editor*).

[37] Since later, in the beginning of 2007 the USA has imposed economic sanctions against air companies owned by Viktor Bout and registered in the UAE and various African countries (*note by editor*).

[38] One of the Russian TV channels.

[39] This was not the only time. Lieutenant-Colonel of the reserve Igor Zhdarkin recalls another occasion – the South African planes, flying at a low-level, burned away 29 petrol tankers on the “road of life” between Menonge and Cuito-Cuanavale. In total on the road there were over 350 remains of burned out tanks, **BTRs**, Infantry combat vehicles, petrol tankers and trucks.

[40] In each of the elite Angolan FAPLA brigades (16th, 21st, 47th and 59th) there were Soviet military advisers, specialists and interpreters (from 6 to 15 people). (*Sergei Kolominin. Russian Special Forces in Africa, 2005, p. 227.*)

[41] About the Brazilian **Engesa** truck. They were of two types: small, twin-shafted **Engesa 15** similar to the Soviet **GAZ-66** and large six-wheeled **Engesa 25** and **Engesa 50** similar to the **ZIL-131**. But its wheels were a lot narrower than on the Soviet models and as a result its cross-country ability was a lot worse. You felt that the **Engesa** was an old generation truck both from its looks but especially by the it drove. These were vehicles from the 1950s-1960s. The engine was weak and both the suspension and particularly the chassis were not suited to the tough sandy terrain. **Engesas** performed badly. The Angolans liked our **GAZ-66s** and especially **KrAZs** and **Urals** a lot more. These trucks followed the armoured vehicles and would pass everywhere as well as the armoured vehicles, the **BTRs**, tanks, infantry combat vehicles (*note by Mityaev*).

But not everybody agrees with this judgement on the **Engesa** truck. A different matter is the fact that Soviet trucks like the **GAZ-66**, **Ural-375**, **Ural-4320** (diesel engine), **ZIL-131**, **KrAZ-255** (diesel engine) and the East German **IFA W50** (diesel engine) truck had more powerful engines, larger capacity and better cross-country capability (*note by editor*).

[42] Jonas Savimbi – the leader of the National Union for Total Liberation of Angola (UNITA), the organisation, which from 1975 to 2002 was in opposition to the legitimate government of Angola (MPLA) and conducted an almost unceasing armed struggle for power in the country. Savimbi and his closest allies were killed in 2002 and his movement ceased armed struggle and is now the legal opposition in the parliament (*note by editor*).

[43] The rocket-propelled shell from the **Valkiri** gun is stuffed with 60kg of explosives and 8500 small metal balls, which had wounding power for a distance of up to 1500m (*note by editor*).

[44] Deputy commander for political affairs (*note by editor*).

[45] In 1988 there were 55 000 Cuban servicemen in Angola, out of these 40 000 in the south of the country (30 000 FAPLA soldiers were also there). The Cubans concentrated up to 600 tanks and over 1000 anti aircraft systems there. (*from Fidel Castro's speech on a rally on the 2nd of December 2005*).

[46] To be more precise the bridge was blasted by the South African military frogmen (*note by editor*).

[47] On 12th and 21st of March 1988 the heaviest of battles took place between the South African army and the Cuban and Angolan troops near Cutio-Cuanavale. The South Africans were forced to retreat, because of the danger of their units being encircled by the Cuban troops who has landed in the ports of southern Angola. The battle could be classed to have finished as a draw, but in reality South Africa had lost (*note by editor*).

[48] By most probably the UNITA artillery was involved (*note by editor*).

[49] General Roberto Leal Ramos Monteiro “Ngongo” – Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary Ambassador of the Republic of Angola to the Russian Federation in 2000-2006. Since 2006 till now he has been the Angolan Minister of Internal Affairs (*note by editor*).

[50] In other words the fullest information on the battle for Cuito-Cuanavale, about the build up to the combat, the military actions themselves and operations that followed immediately

afterwards is possibly located in the archives of the Angolan Ministry of Defence in Portuguese, under the signature of General “Vietnam” (*note by editor*).

[51] Upon returning to Cuba the hero of the war in Ethiopia (Ogaden, 1978) and in Angola (1987-1988), the Cuban Brigade General Orlando Ochoa Sanchez, who effectively waged the battle of Cuito-Cuanavale, was sentenced to death in 1989, officially for participation the drugs trade (*note by editor*).

[52] Record was made by Gennady Shubin on 12th June 2004.

[53] Possibly these were **Cheetah** fighter planes used by South Africa in small quantities by the SAAF in Angola. But most probably what is meant here are the **Mirage F I** fighter planes (*note by editor*).

[54] **Cheetah** – a South African modernized copy of the Israeli **Kfir** fighter plane (*note by editor*).

[55] **MTLB** stands for “Multi-purpose tracked vehicle” in Russian.

[56] He meant **AK-47**. It’s worth mentioning that **AK-47**, **AKM** and the newest Russian variant of **AKM** – **AK-103** all named “sub-machine guns” in Russian, not “assault rifles” because it’s bullet (7.62x39 mm) is made for short range or middle-range combat (up to 500-600 meters). Angolan FAPLA forces were armed with obsolete Soviet-made **AK-47** (production seized in the USSR in 1958). **AKM** (improved version of **AK-47**) was produced in the USSR from 1959 till 1974 and is still being produces without proper licences in many countries. Several dozen million copies of **AKM** are circulating in the whole world and are mistakenly named “**AK-47** Russian assault rifle”. It would be more correct to name this famous light weaponry as well as it’s derivates (**AKM** and **AK-103**) as “the long-barrelled sub-machine gun” (*note by editor*).

[57] Until 1989 all students of higher educational establishments including the military academies had to pass an exam on Marxist-Leninist philosophy, which included writing up a conspectus (brief-ish summary) on selected works by Marx, Engels and Lenin (*note by editor*).

[58] Pervatch – the strongest high quality hooch (*note by editor*).

[59] The ammunition of a **T-55** tank consists of 43 100mm shells and 3500 cartridges for the two 7.62mm **PKT** machine guns. The tank is manned by a crew of four (*note by editor*).