

November 28, 1962

Letter, Chief of the Operations Group in the Port of Baltiysk Vice Admiral Mel'nikov to Comrade S.P. Ivanov, attaching a trip report of the motorship 'Volgoles'

Citation:

"Letter, Chief of the Operations Group in the Port of Baltiysk Vice Admiral Mel'nikov to Comrade S.P. Ivanov, attaching a trip report of the motorship 'Volgoles'", November 28, 1962, Wilson Center Digital Archive, TsAMO fond 1, opis 14041cc, delo 1, ll. 15-19. Contributed by Sergey Radchenko and Vladislav Zubok and translated by Gary Goldberg. <https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/300483>

Summary:

A detailed report following the motorship Volgoles from 4 October to 24 November 1962. The report includes information about US overflights and inspections of the motorship. Various shortcomings of the Soviet effort in Cuba are also mentioned.

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TO THE CHIEF OF THE MAIN OPERATIONS DIRECTORATE OF GENERAL STAFF
TO GENERAL-COLONEL
Comrade S. P. IVANOV

With this I am submitting the trip report of the Captain of the motor ship "Volgoles", Cde. I. F. SEPELEV, the flight pattern of the aircraft overflights and inspection by US ships of the motor ship "Volgoles" when crossing during the period 8 - 12 November 1962, and photographs of destroyer N^o 888 and US Navy aircraft, and also photographs of the helicopter, ships, and US Navy aircraft which conducted an inspection of the motor ship "Alapayevsk" during the period 7 -13 November 1962.

Attachment: 1. The trip report, mp. N^o 2907, copy 1, on four sheets.
2. The flight and inspection pattern, mp N^o 2906, copy 1, on one sheet. Photographs N^o N^o 1, 2, 3 (unclassified). [translator's note: not included.]
3. Photographs N^o N^o 4, 5, 6, 7, 8 (unclassified).[translator's note: not included.]
All are only to the addressee.

CHIEF OF THE OPERATIONS GROUP
IN THE PORT OF BALTIYSK

VICE ADMIRAL
[signature] MEL'NIKOV

[handwritten: 28] November 1962
[handwritten: Outgoing N^o 255/s]
[handwritten: Cde. Strelets, Cde. Glotov, take into account. (illegible signature) 7 December]

[stamp: Main Operations, Directorate of the General Staff]

[handwritten: Eight 4/s [SIC] photographs and the attachments are being retained. (illegible signature) 11 December 1962]

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TRIP REPORT

On trip N^o 6 Baltiysk - Bahia - Honda, which began on 4 October, the motor ship "Volgoles" was twice overflown by American aircraft. On 18 October at 1400 2200N 7328W two-engine bombers 13550 N^o 3 and N^o 7 made 10 overflights at low altitudes. On 18 October at 2010 aircraft N^o 9 made four overflights at low altitudes with a spotlight turned on. On 12 October at 3539N 3703W a bright orange float was detected having the shape of a life preserver, but with larger dimensions: an outer diameter of two meters 47 centimeters and an inner diameter of 94 centimeters. On

the float it was written: [handwritten in English: do not disturb K-3 Woods Hole Oceanographic Institute [SIC], Woods Hole MASS USA. US Navy [SIC]].

This float was raised on board and used as a working float to color the side of the ship in repainted and equipped form.

No one met us Bahia Honda, where the ship arrived on 20 October. In the evening of the same day, a representative of VOSO [Military Transportation], N. T. Dobrodub, arrived at the ship and declared that no one expected the motor ship "Volgoles" in Cuba in spite of the fact that I sent a dispatch radiogram to Karamzin on 15 October. On the morning of 21 October they started unloading, but were forced to halt in view of the fact that the ship was redirected to Mariel (according to the directions [we] were to go to Isabella). We reloaded the contents back on board and went to Mariel on the evening of 21 October, where part of the deck cargo was unloaded, after which it turned out that the remaining cargo needed to be unloaded at the port of Nicara in the eastern part of the island of Cuba. On the morning of 23 October, having two 40-ton cutters in tow (one of them a divers' [boat]), the motor ship "Volgoles" departed Mariel for Nicara with a stop in Havana to replenish the bunker. They did not release the ship from Havana in connection with the announcement of the blockade of the island of Cuba. For this reason the cargo was unloaded in the port of Havana, after which on 5 November the ship left for Mariel, where it was loaded with bulky special equipment and left port at 0900 8 November.

Passing abeam of Havana at 3-4 [nautical] miles an aircraft appeared and disappeared in a northerly direction, but from 1300 at 2316N 3150W until 1325 two-engine American aircraft [handwritten: LK] 128367 N° 6 made low-level overflights of the ship. At 1430 at 2318N 3127W an American destroyer N° 383 approached the ship and laid on a parallel course at a distance of two cable lengths off board and asked the type and quantity of the cargo. I replied that we were carrying seven missiles. Afterward for a long period of time the destroyer insisted on a show of the missiles, which were covered by a tarpaulin. Having instructions from the USSR Minister of the Merchant Fleet Bakayev that the missiles could be shown only to a ship under the UN flag and in no event to a ship under the US flag, I categorically refused to uncover the tarpaulins, explaining to the Americans to whom I could show the missiles. After this the "K" flag was raised on the destroyer, but was quickly lowered. At the same time, two aircraft, 131408 and 131451 appeared over the ship, then they were replaced by two helicopters N° 61 and 58 and an aircraft 140963, which conducted overflights and photography of the ship until 1700. Destroyer N° 883 left from the side and instead of it another destroyer began to accompany [us] at a distance of 2.5 miles from the ship, which around midnight was in turn replaced by a third destroyer N° 878.

When the first destroyer N° 883 approached the side I ordered radio communications to be opened and maintained with Moscow or Leningrad or with a mediator in view of the situation which had developed. Unfortunately, [we] were not able to establish communications with Moscow, Leningrad, or a mediator in view of the poor propagation, but a mediator contacted us only twice a day according to the schedule. And only after about an hour were communications established with the mediator, which had a quite urgent enciphered message from Moscow for transmission to us. After decipherment it became clear that the tarpaulins needed to be removed from the missiles and shown to the American helicopters and ships.

At 0210 9 November at 2247N 7840E an unidentified aircraft [entered by hand: made] several overflights of the ship. At 0800 at 2206N 7726W an American destroyer N° 378 going in the wake approached the port side at a distance of 30 meters, laid on a parallel course, and suggested removing the tarpaulins from the missiles on the port side of the bow deck. The tarpaulins were completely removed at their request, after which the destroyer asked that the tarpaulins be partially removed from the five missiles on the aft deck. At 0825 the destroyer crossed to the starboard side and looked at the partially uncovered warheads of the missiles of the starboard side of the aft deck, then asked that the tarpaulin of a missile of the starboard side of the bow deck be fully uncovered, which was also done by us. The labels of the missiles on the airtight covers were pre-sealed on the missiles of the bow deck, and the stabilizers of these missiles were covered by people during the visual observation and photography from the destroyer. During all this time an

American aircraft [handwritten: LR] 143176 N° 10 was flying over the ship at a low altitude. At 0925 visual observation was concluded and the flag signal "thank you" was raised on the destroyer and through a loudspeaker was sent in Russian: "I wish you a happy return home." After this the destroyer went in the wake and accompanied us to the turn from the Cuban coast, that is, until 1200, after which he turned back. Before the departure of the destroyer aircraft [handwritten: LR] 131488 N° 5 made 9 overpasses of the ship. At 1631 at 2135N 7586W an aircraft without identifying markings with the number 4280 P on the fuselage made overflights for 10 minutes. At 1645 at 2136N 7529W aircraft 7571 and 141235 made overflights of the ship for 15 minutes. At 1720 at 2138N 7513W US destroyer N° 863 asked the name of the ship. At 2100 at 2148N 7517W an unidentified aircraft made 12 overflights of the ship at low altitudes with the distinguishing lights turned off.

At 0200 10 November at 2158N 7313W a warship asked the name of the ship and its affiliation, after which it approached the ship at a distance of 1 mile; at this same time overflights of the ship by an unidentified aircraft continued at a low altitude for 35 minutes with the distinguishing lights turned off. At 0245 the vessel took a southward course. At 0540 at 2208N 7223W an unidentified aircraft with a spotlight turned on flew over the ship twice. At 0824 at 2218N 7145W aircraft [handwritten: GO] 33762 N° 821 made 3 overflights of the ship, then aircraft [handwritten: AS] 6747 N° 39 [handwritten: NEVi VS-] 31 made 4 overflights. At 1635 at 2246N 6934W aircraft 6531 N° 21 overflew the ship at a low altitude for 10 minutes. At 1720 at 2249N 6920W aircraft [handwritten: AS] 6747 N° 39 made nine overflights.

At 1440 on 11 November at 2403N 6400W aircraft [handwritten: LB] 131449 N° 2 overflew the ship at a low altitude for 20 minutes.

At 1140 12 November an American aircraft [handwritten: LA] 128334 N° 3 also overflew the ship at a low altitude for 20 minutes.

The American destroyers were patrolling in full combat readiness and the crew[s] were at their battle stations. The interpreter on each did not know Russian very well. An exchange took place in short phrases in Russian and English. The ship's course was as close to the coast of the island of Cuba as the navigational situation permitted.

At 1330 Moscow time on 24 November at 5624N 1214W a Swedish jet fighter with identification signs "T" 11 made a series of overflights at low altitude for seven minutes, and at 1615 on the same date in the area of Ven (the Oresund Sound) a Swedish pleasure craft without a name and home port with the letter "T" on the bow (the same as the aircraft) took a parallel course 50 meters from the side for 10 minutes.

During the ship's anchorage in the port of Havana the incomprehensible silence of the situation from 24 through 28 October 1962 ought to be noted. Both the Embassy and our troops knew that a landing operation against Cuba on the night of Thursday and Friday was being prepared with a preliminary aerial bombardment. Ship captains in Havana were warned that a vehicle was in constant readiness. The twin ZPU anti-aircraft guns with ammunition and service personnel that were on board three of our ship were covered to hide them and readied for transport according to instructions. Thus, in the event of an attack on Havana we could not have used the weapons on board in time (before leaving Havana they were taken to shore together with the crew).

During the sea crossing the motor ship "Volgoles" hit a force-10 storm to the west of the Bay of Biscay. The ship's list reached 34 degrees. All steps were taken by the crew and the military to save the cargo, which was handed over at the port of destination in full without complaints. During the previous crossing to Cuba southwest of the Azores Islands the ship passed through a zone of strong swells from the northwest and the list reached 38 degrees. The cargo did not receive damage.

Both during the period of the climax of the Cuban Crisis as well as for the entire voyage the crew of the motor ship "Volgoles" was mobilized to perform sailing directions, save the ship, and maintain the honor of a Soviet sailor. There were no violations of discipline.

The lack of information to the crew about the international and domestic situation of the USSR at the end of October needs to be regarded as a significant shortcoming.

During the period the ship was anchored in the port of Havana the ship radio receivers did not receive Soviet radiobroadcasting stations, and all the Statements of the Soviet Government and its Chairman, Cde. N. S. Khrushchev were received by us and with a great delay, like all the rest of the news from Moscow

Captain of the motor ship "Volgoles"
[signature] (Sepelev)

[handwritten: 25 November 1962]