

## THE ARMY AND THE PUTSCH OF 1993

GRACHEV: What is important? First of all, the failure of the GKChP and the revolt, and the civil war that nearly happened. It was about to start both in 1991 and in 1993—no doubt about that. Especially in 1993. Groups were spontaneously forming around the country: one of them supported the GKChP and another supported Yeltsin in 1991; in 1993, one was for Khasbulatov and Rutskoi and the other for Yeltsin. The country was on the brink of a civil war—and I think that the resolute stand of the armed forces didn't allow it to happen.

AVEN: Please, specify the role of the armed forces in 1991 and 1993.

GRACHEV: In 1991 the armed forces didn't allow ... No, it would be more correct to say they didn't imprison Yeltsin. That was the most important thing.

AVEN: Practically, they refused to engage in the conflict.

GRACHEV: They didn't get involved in the conflict, and thus prevented a squabble—first on the local level and then on a broader level, across Russia. Although the fight across the country might have been insignificant, because Yeltsin was still unknown to many. And in 1993 only the determined stand of the armed forces—six inert projectiles fired by a tank at the White House and the capture of those guys, Rutskoi, Khasbulatov, others, as well as Dunayev, Barannikov, and so on—prevented a civil war in Russia. Why? Because local leaders and certain military commanders were on standby. Who wins? If the other side had won, there would have been a fight immediately.

AVEN: Were you sure? Rutskoi called and tried to send aircraft to bomb the Kremlin. Were you sure of your troopers? Were you sure that no one would attack the Kremlin?

GRACHEV: Sure, absolutely! Because I had good commanders. Petr Stepanovich Deinekin, my friend, was the air force commander; my friend Semyonov was the army commander; Prudnikov was the air defense commander; and the navy commander was also our friend. Yevgeny Nikolayevich Podkolzin was the Airborne Forces commander. I had appointed my friends to those positions, and I was sure none of them would betray me.

KOKH: How did you make the decision to open fire at the White House?

GRACHEV: Yeltsin, with Korzhakov and a few more men, came to the Defense Ministry at about 3:00 a.m. on October 3. We drank a little.

KOKH: The day before Ostankino was stormed and Interior Ministry soldiers were killed?

GRACHEV: Yes.

AVEN: You say you drank a little.

GRACHEV: We drank a little, and everyone was so agitated. Yeltsin said, "The City Hall and Ostankino have been seized. I think we should capture those men from the White House in order to stop them." I said, as always, "Give me a written order, and I am ready to execute it." Korzhakov retorted, "What written order? Yeltsin, I knew they would be scared!" I told him to shut up. Yeltsin was furious and replied, "You will get your written order!" He lied, though—there was no written order. Then he sobered up a bit, and called me at about 5:00 a.m. (I had been prepared for the storm) hinting that I would have to execute a verbal order.

KOKH: I don't understand why they so feared giving you a written order.

GRACHEV: I told him, "Certainly, I will execute the order. What shall I do?" "Capture these men." "Yeltsin, the 119th Airborne Regiment is stationed near the White House. There will be no problem." But there were plenty of snipers on the right and on the left—there were houses nearby, and there were snipers on every roof.

AVEN: Their snipers?

GRACHEV: Yes, theirs. I said, "No problem, but we will have casualties." "What do you propose?" "I propose to scare them." "How?" "A tank will fire inert projectiles straight at them. They will run away. At least, they will go down to the basement, and snipers will flee the roofs. We will find them in the basement later." "Okay." So I ordered a tank to take a position on the stone bridge near the Ukraine Hotel. I came up to that tank and put a captain in the seat of a gunner and a senior lieutenant in the seat of a mechanic; bullets were flying around: bang, bang, bang. "They won't get

us—they are about to fall,” I thought. I told them, “Do you see these roofs? Now start counting. One, two, three, four, five, six, seventh window. That must be Khasbulatov’s office—they are all there. You must hit that window. Can you do that?” “Comrade Minister, the tank has just had shooting practice—it’s all right.” “And do you have projectiles?” “Live or not?” “Live? Are you out of your mind? Inert.” “Sure, we have some—we came here right from the training range.” “Now target the window.” And lots of people were standing nearby. The bystanders loved it—they watched us as if we were onstage. I said, “Guys, don’t you hit them, or people will die. We will be torn to pieces.” And I asked the captain, “Can you hit the target?” “I can. It is less than a kilometer away.” “And do you see the American embassy building nearby? There will be a scandal if you hit it.” “Comrade Minister, it will be all right.” “Fire, one,” I said. And then I saw the projectile hitting the window precisely. A fire started. It was beautiful. Snipers fled the roofs in an instant. When the snipers were gone and the tanks were done, I ordered the 119th Regiment to storm the building. They smashed the doors and there was some shooting inside. Nine of my men died. There was a clash inside the building after all, but we also killed many.

AVEN: How many?

GRACHEV: A lot.

AVEN: About 200.

GRACHEV: Maybe so—nobody counted. A lot.

AVEN: From 200 to 400, by various estimates.

GRACHEV: Many, in short.

AVEN: White House defenders.

GRACHEV: Yes, defenders. A lot.

AVEN: And who were they? Conscripts or volunteers?

GRACHEV: What conscripts? They were mercenaries, bandits.

KOKH: Where did they get their guns?

GRACHEV: The government, the Supreme Council, and any other building of the kind has armories storing submachine guns and munitions, which are used in case of attack.

AVEN: What about snipers? The same?

GRACHEV: I don't know. They might have been professionals.

KOKH: There were career officers there. Terekhov's Union of Officers.

GRACHEV: There were career officers who had been bought, or who had been fired from the armed forces. They could shoot. And plenty of them were killed.

AVEN: So tank officers opened fire and obeyed your order implicitly.

GRACHEV: Implicitly.

KOKH: And some said they were paid for doing that.

GRACHEV: What money? That might have happened later.

AVEN: They were paid for storming the White House.

GRACHEV: No!

AVEN: As far I remember, some bankers close to the authorities were raising funds from big business. It's unclear where the money went.

KOKH: To repair an abyss, so that it didn't grow bigger. They must have pocketed the money.

GRACHEV: There was no money. We expressed our gratitude to those officers differently. One way or the other, Khasbulatov's forces raised their hands when they saw that we were serious—that we were determined to get them.

AVEN: Did you give the captain an award?

GRACHEV: We made him a Hero of Russia. And the senior lieutenant received a Courage Order, I think. Their names were classified, and they

were transferred to other units. That was beautiful. The White House was ablaze. Pavel Borodin congratulated me and I asked why. "Funds have been assigned, and I will make repairs." I asked: "How much did you snatch?" "No, no, no—not a single kopeck!" As I understand, they spent 20 million on repairs.

KOKH: Nothing is said about that now. This is not a big sum by modern standards.

GRACHEV: It may sound insignificant now, but the sum was huge for 1993!

KOKH: Petr, was that a good story?

AVEN: An impressive story. The man has things to recollect. Those were fundamental historic events. The country was on the brink of a civil war, but the solution was so simple. By the way, was Achalov there?

GRACHEV: Yes, he was there. He was also arrested—all of them were arrested. Korzhakov and Mikhail Ivanovich Barsukov went inside when the danger was gone and shooting had ceased, and imprisoned the "defenders." And I was watching Korzhakov and Barsukov leading them to a bus to take them to Matrosskaya Tishina prison.

AVEN: And some said that forces were ordered to march to Moscow when the putsch was on, but they were in no hurry to get there.

GRACHEV: Some hot shots must have thought our troops ride in Mercedes or Toyotas; we have tanks, armored personnel carriers, or infantry combat vehicles. Their average speed, especially in a convoy (and we had a huge convoy stretching several kilometers), is approximately 20 kilometers per hour. And those civilians claimed we were too slow, and nearly sabotaged the orders. Combat vehicles are not a means of transportation or a taxi—they are built for fighting; and a new tank's service life is only 200 kilometers. What can I say? Our people love to talk. Normal countries bring their combat vehicles to the battlefield by special trucks or by rail. And in this country we are ordered to ride along a highway on caterpillar tracks—and they say we are slow! You know, guys, what hurts most? So many people claimed to be the winners after the events of 1991 and 1993! So many tore their shirts claiming they had won.

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